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ASTRÆA

A MODERN ROMANCE

MRS. MUSGRAVE

ASTRÆA.

PART I.

ASTRÆA:

A MODERN ROMANCE.

BY

MRS. MUSGRAVE.

LONDON:
WHITING AND CO., LIMITED,
30 & 32, SARDINIA STREET, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS, W.C.

1884.

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ASTRÆA.

CHAPTER I.

ANNE MALLISON, aged twenty-one, was a young woman decidedly not after her mother's heart. Her ladyship was too right-minded and orthodox openly to accuse her Maker of a disregard of her maternal prayers and oblations, but nevertheless an impression lingered in her devoutly coloured mind that she had not been fairly dealt with, and that her sacrifices and fulfilment of the laws of spiritual righteousness had not met with a just reward. That Anne had not been created—for she was fully confident that the developing process could have nothing to do with her peculiarities—after the pattern of other women's daughters, was a grievance secretly laid against Providence. This judge's wife belonged to the class of matrons whose sympathies are in no wise unduly broad, but whose joys, on the other hand, are never irrational. Lady Mallison's affections were strictly subject to reason and propriety. Clearly she was not intended to act the part of comforter to any erring relatives, neither was she fitted to become the recipient of marital confidences or the depositary of childish woes. Of judicious silences, tender oblivions, gentle cancellings of faults, or of loving tact, she knew

nothing. Her heart was absolutely ignorant of tolerating compassions, and the sweet balm and oil of gentle pity never flowed therefrom. A fault or a sin was always to be punished according to a certain code, never to be condoned by reason of extenuating circumstances. Anne's mother never kissed a place to make it well. It was rather her way to blister a wounded heart with homilies. Yet within certain hard and fast lines she did her duty diligently, seeking a kingdom to come along an orthodox and well-trodden road. There were no by-paths to heaven, to her knowledge or belief.

The judge, in the beginning of his matrimonial days, possibly by reason of a caution acquired in his profession, had been in no haste to mark his Clara with any conjugal freemasonry which should qualify her to take part in his secret thoughts, or to look on his soul's desire. Her ladyship had even no notion that there were depths in her husband's heart beyond her plummet. But the child Anne was not very old before she discovered that the soundings were out of reach of her line. From her earliest years she was a curious, unsatisfactory child. In babyhood she seemed to give evidence of a rebellious and passionate spirit. These evil dispositions were not, however, suffered to develop, and Anne, checked and thwarted, ceased to kick against the pricks. Gradually she began to live a life apart, and to hide her real feelings under an exterior of cold reserve.

Mamma was very kind, of course. It is true she fulfilled the maternal office without much delight or grace, but no dereliction of duty could be laid to her charge. When Anne was little she was tended by trustworthy and

attentive nurses, fed on the most wholesome diet, given the handsomest of toys and broadest of sashes. Later on came governesses and lesson books, tutors, masters, musical instruments, all fully qualified to perfect the feeblest talent. Lady Mallison herself would take care that her restless child should learn to sit still on the back seat of the barouche, and not turn an inquiring or anxious glance behind her in the streets towards beggars or cripples. Yet it was certain that Anne's mamma had not the power to make her mind still, or to hinder her childish speculations concerning the words and works of those she knew best. Much fire, no doubt, was smothered by Lady Mallison's endeavours to suppress the enthusiasm of an ardent nature. But it was not quite extinguished. The stature of Anne's originality and upgrowing beliefs being kept down by a strong hand of propriety, the sap of life found a vent sideways, producing a growth of philosophy which appeared like cynicism. Beneath that exterior few guessed what strong yearnings and passions lived and were mighty. Yet Lady Mallison herself, when her daughter in due course of time grew up and was publicly presented, had an uncomfortable feeling that all was not as it should be, and that her system of education had been a failure. Her ironing board had been too smooth, her irons too hot, and instead of a perfect process turning Anne out like other girls, the mark had been overshot. There was not so much as a crease in her manners. Her well-bred daughter never betrayed spontaneous feeling, nor gave a sign of girlish enthusiasm. Beyond desire, she was self-possessed and womanly. What more could be done?

It was only in her father's society that Anne occasionally betrayed her real self. She worshipped him with a blind devotion, seeing no wrong in anything he did. A worship of some kind was necessary to Anne, though she would have defied the notion that hers was a venerating mind. The judge was the broadest-minded, clearest-sighted person she had ever come familiarly in contact with. At an early age, when the problems of right and wrong began to trouble her, she had been wont to go to him to have things explained, if not made clear and straight. Now this small Anne, with a commonplace mother and brilliant father, was gifted with a discerning intellect and large powers of observation. She found it difficult to reconcile her mother's narrow creed with her father's tolerant interpretations of life and his cynical contempt of its ills. As a matter of course, she failed to square the circle of humanity within her ken. The inconsistencies of men and women were intolerable difficulties. There were no straight lines of right and wrong, but each shaped them as they would like them. There was neither rhyme nor reason in actions or religions. Under these circumstances she buried her doubts and fears as well as she could, assuming a sort of indifference which sat so well on her that people believed her naturally cold and sarcastic. In her pinafore days the judge took no heed of his young daughter. It was only when the influence of her early training had had due effect upon her that his attention was attracted to her bright intelligence and strong mental gifts. Some of the colours of her soul were then already fixed, and it was too late to dip her in another dye. However, he began to observe her critically as a thing of

interest, and even to wonder a little concerning her. He was subtle enough to perceive that she exercised an independent judgment, in spite of an outward demeanour of submission. That she was by no means a reflection of her mother made itself evident to him by degrees; and as he perceived his child's capacity for suffering and enjoyment under her calm exterior, his interest deepened. Not that he openly manifested any comprehension of her mind and its workings. He habitually used a language of raillery towards her, thereby helping to wrap her in her own cloak of reserve.

In spite of having made a marked failure in her system of education, Lady Mallison was a happy woman. Her happiness was of a calm, orderly kind, easily maintained by a well-oiled domestic machinery and a due amount of social déference, which her position was able to supply her with. Her circle of acquaintance contained a large element of barristers and their wives, who naturally did a certain amount of homage to the judge's wife, wisely showing their appreciation of her faultless dinners. The sympathy of husband or child was not missed. Her deepest yearnings for companionship might have been fully supplied by cats, dogs, or canaries. These would certainly have been tranquil, precise, and admirably conducted quadrupeds and bipeds. But wearing a wedding-ring, and having a multitude of duties, she did not think of such adoptions. She put on many phylacteries which made her life happy. The first duty of woman was to carry out social traditions. Her table of law had custom and precedence graven upon it in indelible characters. Stringent rules of etiquette she had faithfully followed

from her youth up. Every evening one of her religious ordinances, after having commended her most righteous self to the giver of all virtues, was to examine her mind and to take note if haply it had been *too* merciful towards a sinner. She gave tithes of reverence to whom reverence was due—a bishop or a lord. Her mint and cummin were religiously paid in cards, dinner parties, and deference to influential people. Her propriety of behaviour, her opinions, her manners, were irreproachable. Her conventional observance of spiritual duties were charms openly displayed in the sight of the multitude. "So good, so charitable, so devout!" murmured the chorus of St. Margaret's curates within earshot of her ladyship. It was indeed hard upon her, with the frontlet of virtues between her eyes, that Providence should not have rewarded her endeavours to bring up her child in the way it should go.

A lady well qualified to be the wife of a clear-headed, hard-hearted judge of assize, you think? She knew better than to seek to temper justice with mercy in her own small transactions of life. Certainly the judge did not reproach *his* Maker for any uneasy matrimonial lines. Had they fallen in pleasant places? He was never heard to indicate any incompatibility of temper, and certainly no one else was justified in thinking his spouse might not be suited to his requirements. As to Lady Mallison herself, she was perfectly well satisfied with her prize in the lottery of husbands. If the truth could have been known, I am of opinion that she made frequent pharisaical thanksgivings in her luxurious pew at St. Margaret's, that, owing to her influence, the judge was not as other men are.

What grateful celebrations of her own virtues were whispered into the pages of her ivory-bound prayer-book cannot be declared, only speculated upon. She had drilled her partner into an outward submission very creditably. He yielded his inclinations to system and order. He was not shabby, like some who are eminent in the law. He always duly telegraphed the hour of his return, so that bath and slippers and dinner might be in readiness. According to the seasons, he obediently changed his flannels. He took gruel if he had a cold, and never smoked within the precincts of Portland Place. Beyond doubt he was an admirable husband and an easy man to live with, conforming himself to punctuality and rule, and reasonably submitting to persuasion. He had, however, the discretion to keep his papers, books, legal documents, in chambers. Of the dust and confusion which reigned unchecked there her ladyship had not the faintest conception. In spite of his docility in some ways the judge was a man to be feared, and outside her own province I believe his Clara stood in wholesome awe of him. Perhaps she retaliated in domestic tyranny.

How the judge had come to be married to this lady was a mysterious matter to all except the few intimate friends who had known him in earlier years. His eminent position now placed him beyond the familiarity of all but those few. Moreover, there was a disagreeable coldness of manner, perceptible to the least observant, at any approach to inquiry concerning private matters. A certain tough old General, who had been acquainted with the Mallison family from early years, had revealed some circumstances concerning the judge's courtship to a select

few in an after-dinner expansiveness of mood. These threads of verity had been carefully gathered up by the curious.

Miss Boggis, a lady of City parentage and considerable expectations, had been standing on debateable ground for some time, in the opinion of uncharitable friends, when it all happened. Not that there is any debateable land between young ladyism and old maidism for a spinster of certain means, derived from funded property. This one is never a social failure. But Miss Boggis's means were not certain. She had a small income assured to her, and only large prospects from a cantankerous old relative, by whom she had been adopted. Her fluctuating hopes were not conducive to happiness or any peace of mind.

Clara, fretted by peevish complaints, and weary of waiting for a dead woman's shoes, had begun seriously to contemplate retiring from the world of City fashion, and abandoning matrimonial competition with younger and more attractive rivals. She had even thought of sinking part of her small fortune in a charitable institution, and establishing herself as matron. For some time past she had forsaken the entertainments of the light-minded, and a superior severity and modesty in her attire denoted significantly that the shameless tulle-and-froth stage of existence had been passed. Poor cousin Hepzibah, a round-eyed, rosy-cheeked damsel, some few years her junior, sorely felt her own reprehensible weakness when the hard-featured Clara surveyed her be-crinolined tarlatans with a glance of disdain.

"There's no necessity, Hepzibah, for you to show *quite*

so much of your neck; it wants a two-inch tucker to be decent."

Nevertheless, Hepzibah held to the display of one of her chief charms, a throat and bosom snowy as a swan's. It won the admiration of an alderman, and Hepzibah was promoted to the honour of matrimony before the immaculate Clara.

Miss Boggis had, with much mortification of spirit, already realised her own homely features, unattractive figure, and thirty-three years. These are not softening influences in the majority of cases—cases where matrimony is the desired goal. At this epoch, hard, steel-grey gowns and featherless, flowerless bonnets betrayed the soul of bitterness within her. Enter a brilliant unknown. Presto! soft laces and frills are sought out. Clara no longer parts her hair "Madonna-wise, on either side her head." She wears fresh gloves, new shoes, pearl-grey silks and satins, refusing to abandon hope.

It was at a dinner party, given by one of her aldermanic relatives at Highgate—a periodical feast of sumptuous magnificence, where neither much reason nor soul customarily feasted or flowed—that a strange partner walked Miss Boggis down to table. This gentleman so exhilarated her unaccustomed mind by his shining conversational talents, as well as by the distinguished unknown cut of his whiskers, that she then, and at subsequent meetings, unbarred the door of her maidenly reserve and prudence to the fascinating Q.C. who had fallen like a meteor from a starry sky upon a dark world. He was slow to respond to Clara's efforts to please, and though he at intervals appeared at feasts and festivals at Highgate, the admiring

glances of the young woman who invariably fell to his lot as a dinner partner, failed to inspire any reciprocal warmth. So, languishing for a year in undetermined state of mind, Miss Boggis suffered her benevolent intentions to fall to the ground.

Suddenly the old lady, whose vagaries the unfortunate Clara had endured with Christian fortitude, departed this life, without any preliminary ailments to give her time to alter her will. Her niece was found to be the sole inheritress of her wealth, and her relations forthwith flocked about her with advice and attentions. She was not confused or flustered by the sudden warmth of affection lavished upon her, nor did she treat the sycophants with scorn or derision. She was just enough to recognise that she herself had lived a parasitic life hitherto. Fair she would be to them, rebutting calmly their specious and plausible offers of assistance, but not visiting any malicious spite upon their new officiousness. Perhaps they would have liked her better if she had done so. She would be just to their weaknesses, which she shared, but she was not going to be merciful to the extent of lending money to any impecunious cousins.

Meanwhile, Clara mourned a decent period for the decease of her tormentor. Once or twice Mr. Mallison, Q.C., dined at Highgate, and found his constant companion absent. Her altered circumstances were made known to him. Then they met again. Clara, in priceless lace, black satin, and diamonds, did not look at all amiss, with the self-satisfied air of prosperity about her. A little longer yet, a little more perseverance, a shade more warmth, and the backward swain was persuaded to

advance and take possession of the vessel which Clara called her heart. After a short period of wooing, the nuptials were celebrated with great *éclat*. Her lover, for want of a more descriptive term, was, in the opinion of the majority, to be envied. Was not her heart all his own, and her fortune quite princely?

I must here admit that the decided encouragement given by Miss Boggis to the rising barrister was a behaviour not in accordance with her former principles of conduct and deportment. The sobriety and coyness of a well-conducted young woman ought to be patent to the eyes of beholders, whereas she had certainly gone out of her way to ensure success.

The highly respectable family of Boggis never had any cause to regret the introduction of Mr. Mallison to its heiress. He subsequently more than realised the expectations of his connections, placing Clara on a level above their civic heads. She herself, though never attaining comeliness, lost all angles, growing comfortable and placid beneath the smiles of fortune. She patronised a milliner who did not disfigure her, and was a very presentable woman in society. In her barouche she looked a stately British matron, not to be lightly esteemed by the vulgar. She was supremely satisfied to feel that she had reached a social rank beyond her hopes, and that a matronly status had not eluded her grasp. In spite of unkind prophecy, success had attended her patient waiting and endurance of fortune's buffets. Of course, in time, Lady Mallison forgot to be thankful that she had gained a husband, and threw out hints concerning other designing spinsters which were scarcely kind.

CHAPTER II.

THE daughter Anne, already mentioned, was the only child of the union between Mr. Mallison and the City lady who had chosen him. This young lady was, as I have said, the single thorn her ladyship's flesh could complain of. Wherein had she failed in her duty towards her offspring? Under her calm exterior it almost seemed that Anne was self-willed. Self-willed, you understand, in a lady-like way, always appearing subject to authority. She never asserted herself, never declared she would not, or could not, do this or that. Yet, after a quietly persistent fashion, she usually achieved her own determination. Had she looked closely at herself she might have recognised in this steady resistance a Boggis characteristic. A couple of generations of quiet, toiling City merchants had brought out the features of strong obstinacy to circumstances. This obstinacy was marked in Anne. Family features or qualities, when they come out in the female branches, frequently appear to develop more strongly.

This young lady, however, was not of that clay, esteemed in these showy days, which rejoices to develop strange and eccentric ways and tastes, becoming the dread and anxiety of those responsible for it. Under ordinary circumstances Anne was calm and self-contained, never pedantic nor strong-minded, nor even particularly interesting, except to a few. Her mind did not occupy itself with

politics, or run much in the groove of milliners' fal-lals. She was not frivolous or given to frequent laughter, or female friendships. Extravagance in dress she did not know how to indulge in.

"My clothes never wear out, and I never get tired of them," she would say when a change was suggested. Not as other maidens were, was Anne, in the matter of high art crazes. She never made the feeblest attempt to desecrate the comfortable splendour of the Portland Place mansion with artistic imitations, Japanese counterfeits, peacock's tails, Eastern embroideries, or ridiculous gimcracks of the hour. No benevolent whims led her to attend ambulance classes for the pleasure of binding up little boys in yards of bandages, or to rise early to prosecute the drudgery of scouring pots and pans at South Kensington. Neither was she devout after any troublesome fashion. In a general way she took her ease without much enjoyment, yet not finding her kingdom of heaven in any great enthusiams.

If John Spencer happened to find her alone, and doing nothing, she philosophised to him with admirable logic on vain haste and fruitless endeavour. He always listened attentively, with eyes cast down, but with an aggravating smile which somehow puzzled her. Her habitual appearance of careless indifference or superiority to mundane considerations, seemed strange to those who knew the nature of young girls. Lovers, and dress and pleasure, were not to be connected with her thoughts. They did not know that she boasted secretly, that she never made herself ridiculous by any fervour, and never had to recant a confession or opinion, or regret an admission. Anne's

pride in not being natural or spontaneous was not a noble one.

But the stoical indifference which Miss Mallison aimed at, and believed she had achieved, does not always, in spite of every effort, succeed in accomplishing a deep inward callousness. Anne had fully resolved to do her best not to care greatly about anything in life. There were so many problems she could not understand, so many evils she could not remedy. What was the good of troubling herself, when she had no power to move other people's pity, or to demand their aid? But the caustic she applied to her own mind could not entirely destroy her sympathy, though in the end a varnish of equanimity gave an outward assertion of cold-heartedness.

But let me tell you, I have known frail creatures, full of tender sensibility of speech, with mobile looks, tearful eyes and tremulous voice, answering to every frown with a glance of fear, or to a hard word with a quaver of distress; delicate things like Æolian harps, trembling sympathetically on every string to the breath of the faintest breeze, yet with no depth of heart to be sensible to true sorrow, with no pity for the real pains of life.

In some things Anne Mallison was hardly feminine. She never cared to make her female acquaintance envious or herself remarkable. Her pin-money was unlimited, and she might order what she liked of her mother's dressmakers. Yet Lady Mallison complained that she did not dress suitably or becomingly, and that having her clothes made by unfashionable dressmakers was a fatal mistake. The truth was, Anne could get no well-known house to adopt her views regarding the becoming, and she was of

a mould too distinctive to adapt herself to the variable forms of a dressmaker's fancy. She adhered by choice to rich stuffs and few furbelows, and in an unconcerned way actually reached a style that suited her admirably. The worst of it was that it admitted of so few changes. In her invariable simplicity of attire, Lady Mallison declared her daughter always looked the same.

"And why should I *not* look the same, mamma? Am I not to be recognised by my friends? Is there any particular gain in variety? Flowers and birds are always the same colour and shape."

Lady Mallison was never metaphysical, so did not enlarge on the delights of diversity and change, saying tritely:

"Variety is always charming, Anne. Isn't there something in the poets about infinite variety?"

Anne stifled a lady-like yawn.

"I daresay, mamma. Yes, I think there was a man called Shakespeare once. He wrote plays. But why should I want to be charming?"

After which remark you will perhaps admit that Anne was rather an aggravating young woman.

When she first entered society, Lady Mallison had regarded the young men who hovered about her daughter at balls and "at homes" with a certain amount of fear. She was not quite sure what attitude Anne might take towards detrimentals. For beneath Anne's outward dutiful demeanour her ladyship felt that rebellion might lurk.

Cousin Hepzibah, now Mrs. Alderman Turnover, was occasionally, as a matron of experience with three

daughters on hand, the recipient of Lady Mallison's condescending confidences.

"Anne is not like other girls, Hepzibah, you see. You may be thankful that none of your children are attractive or likely to be sought out for their fortunes."

Poor Hepzibah had to swallow her mortification as best she could beneath the patronage of her relative. She was impressed with the necessity of maintaining a foothold in Portland Place. Her plebeian soul was there occasionally lifted up by the arm of a peer escorting her down to dinner.

"If I tell her that she is not to dance more than twice with the same partner, she will sit all the evening by my side, conversing cheerfully with Mr. Nogo from Somerset House, making herself as pleasant as if he was really eligible."

Nevertheless, in the course of two years Lady Mallison consoled herself that there was nothing serious in any of Anne's *ways*, and that she might safely be trusted the control of her own heart. Very likely, had some of those carpet-knights, fine-mannered, shiny-booted young fools, aspiring to valse themselves into an easy matrimonial harness, known the opinion entertained regarding them, apart from their performances, by Miss Anne Mallison, they would have retired from the contest with outraged dignity of mien.

The heiress's favour did not seem easy to win, and, after a prolonged course of waltzing, it struck some of the less unwise amongst them that they never danced nearer a goal. Beyond a certain point every advance was skilfully defeated. The young men expended much breath,

soiled many pairs of white kids, and took the gloss off the shiny boots in the lists, without reaping any visible favour or reward.

"Yes, mamma, I love waltzing, and Mr. Flotsam carries me like a cloud in a summer breeze. I assure you it's an imperceptible motion. But, oh dear, how sad it is that I never dare let him stop! Indeed, summer clouds are the most depressing of vapours. Don't be afraid. When Strauss's breeze is over I promise you to come back to your wing, without allowing him to evaporate his mind in my society."

Lady Mallison, with plumes nodding reprovingly from the corner of the big landau which takes the voluminous skirts of mother and daughter out to parties, has been holding forth on the enormity of Anne's proceedings on this special evening.

"That way of talking is positively immoral, Anne," she said, with severe dignity.

The girl turned her eyes, which had been gazing speculatively at the morning star, on her mother. Then she smiling unwittingly, though she spoke in the quietest of monotones:

"Does the immorality lie with me, or young Flotsam, or the cloud, mamma? Indeed, I must order my conversation not to shock you."

Lady Mallison rearranged her position, drawing the folds of her fur cloak round her, without a notion of a derisive note in Anne's words.

"I declare it's just like your papa's way of talking to strangers. It may be all very well for a man whose modesty can never be called into question to converse in

a language which says one thing and means another; but for you, Anne, it is altogether improper. There's Uncle Peter and Cousin Hepzibah, who have taken no trouble with their children, and yet they all of them can talk pleasantly on every-day matters, and don't make efforts to puzzle or astonish their friends. Now, Mary or Jane Turnover can tell me whether Lady Tollington's flounces were Honiton or Brussels, and I don't suppose you even know what colour her gown was. And I do believe you almost take a delight in being disagreeable to nice young men. What occasion had you to snub young Molyneux? It is all very well to be clever, as I say; but cleverness without manners is no good nowadays. A clever man, however eccentric, will go down in the world, or, to speak correctly, I ought to say up; but as for a girl who dresses in a singular style, and contradicts people without any apology, she is marked out at once as something to be avoided. Society has made certain laws, and all properly conducted people must follow them."

The carriage wheels rolled on without interruption for a few seconds. Apparently Anne had been meditating, for she took up the thread of her mother's complaint.

"Mr. Molyneux introduced religious subjects between the pauses of a valse. He spoke of things he knew nothing about. Mamma, I thought it was your chief complaint that there was no life or animation about me. Isn't it part of your grievance that I don't take the trouble even to talk to people, much less to puzzle them? It is in me *not* to be interested in things. I am sure you will not find most people call me clever. Indeed, I heard

a man say to-night that I was 'deuced heavy at small talk'."

Her ladyship, being convicted of inconsistent speech, wisely refrained measuring swords with a superior antagonist. If Anne occasionally undertook argument, she got the best of it. Only in a general way she seemed lazy, or indifferent about the charges brought against her, meeting them with a raising of her eyebrows and a sweet smile. In spite of her want of outward energy, Anne exercised a large amount of influence in the Portland Place house. Somehow she was a kind of person impossible to pass over or become unconscious of. Her presence was always felt. Those who made a wise, a witty, or a foolish speech looked to her for approval, or shunned her condemnation. More attractive, more showy and brilliant women might be present, but involuntarily her opinion or glance was sought. At the moment of its delivery, it was not easy to decide if she had marked an impressive speech or an unwise utterance, but by-and-bye some general remark, with a side clause of contempt or gracious praise, would cause the speaker to shrivel up, or expand with a gratified sense of virtue. The graceless sinner felt usually disposed to run out of the room with his tail of assertion very much between his legs. Are we not all curs if a clever woman finds out the whip to touch us?

Servants worshipped Anne, though she was never familiar with them. Children brought her their toys to mend or their quarrels to settle, though she made no advances to them or sought their favour. Yet I cannot say that she was a person easy to get on with. Those young

men already referred to, as well as her cousins, male and female, were on the whole afraid of her. Her puzzling speeches frequently left them in doubt whether she might not, beneath her lazy manner and gravity, be poking fun at them. Her conversation was not animating, and the pauses and intervals of silence had to be filled up by her companion. It was only with the judge and one other that the girl was moved into something different. Beneath certain influences, Anne took the trouble to become amusing, to flash out a rejoinder, and even to betray observing faculties. Very few of his associates would have recognised Judge Mallison, a man learned in the law, of ponderous attainments and classical renown, in that pleasant-looking, elderly papa who beamed with gracious benignity on the white-robed figure of a graceful young woman, discussing vivaciously the humanity of her ken. Anne never condescended to discuss her friends and acquaintance with those whose perceptions were not equal to her own. Fatherly pride shone out of eyes too accustomed to be hard and condemning. Lips firm and unrelenting towards crime unclosed to fond raillery and exchange of repartee. Yes, this austere judge was a different man in the privacy of his own dining-room, with his daughter seated on the arm of his chair. When Anne chose partly to withdraw her mask of indifference to what went on about her, or perhaps when it was charmed away without her volition, a shrewd worldly wisdom distinguished her talk. She showed very clearly that she had studied the primary colours of good and evil. It was the complementary shades of right and wrong, as applied socially, which bewildered her.

In the occasionally bright after-dinner talks in the comfortable dining-room of the London house, Lady Mallison was apt to be forgotten. Fat, fair, and fifty, she did not look amiss at the head of a well-spread table, adorned with lace and diamonds. Indeed, there were some ready to say she was a fine-looking woman. Life had treated her well; her dust-coloured hair gave no evidence of silver threads as yet. Her spinster angularity had disappeared beneath a solid flesh. Time had spared her teeth, and had not been vindictive with his graving tools. Over port wine and filberts her cogitations seldom took more speculative, intellectual, or critical flights than the *menu* of the next day's dinner, or whom she had to leave cards on, or why Tucker, her maid, had not sewn the Honiton lace on to her velvet gown, it being the third week in the month, when her laces were changed with the precision of clockwork. Very punctilious was Lady Mallison, as I have said, with regard to her bowings, callings, invitations, and social observances. Spiteful friends of her youth intimated that her superstitious deference to rank and precedence denoted the unexpected change that had come o'er the spirit of her dream.

Verily new gods are always served zealously. It is only when our fetich has proved clearly unprofitable that we neglect to offer incense, begin to despise it, and finally belabour it with abuse, as absurd, empty, and unnecessary. But the god of her ladyship's idolatry had been kind to her, and she staunchly upheld it. The distinction of a title was hers, and she received Cabinet Ministers on occasions. Did she not attend Drawing Rooms, and was she not invited to State Concerts? As far as she herself

was concerned, she had her heart's desire, and had fulfilled all her mind. It was delightful to witness her superb condescension in receiving some portly bald-headed alderman, towards whom she probably in early years looked for promotion. The undisguised dismay of one who had been but a backward suitor at witnessing the patronage extended to his over-dressed spouse, was almost tragic. It was no part of her ladyship's tactics to ignore former acquaintances if they drifted across her path, but she made more enemies by her demeanour towards them than if she had instituted a cut direct.

During the post-prandial hour, which the judge, when at home, devoted to his family and digestion, the conversation of Anne and her father was at liberty to soar to worlds unknown. Her ladyship, with her tablets before her, would remain unconscious. Everything was done decently and in order by this methodical woman. She tabularised all her expenses, docketed all her bills, made lists, programmes, wrote minute directions regarding every commission given, and in every detail of life carried out her principle of order. After dinner was frequently a settling time which Anne and the judge took advantage of. At other hours—unseasonable moments, in her estimation—she was disposed to resent excursions of wit in which she could not take part.

The dining-room in Portland Place was large and handsomely furnished in a ponderous style, which held its own before Chippendale revivals. A shaded lamp suspended above the table focussed the light on the snowy linen, choice china, and hot-house fruit, always in abundance. The judge was rich, and of course dyspeptic.

His medical adviser counselled corrective vegetable juices, and Lady Mallison fulfilled her wifely duty in administering lemon juice, providing hot-house grapes out of season, pineapples at any price, and forced strawberries as early as the primroses. The room where the family was gathered together was set round with a few, very few, but choice pictures. Heavy plush curtains drawn over closed shutters muffled the roll of outside traffic, which at this hour of the evening, in this quarter, was never noisy. It was about the middle of November, and the logs in the wide fireplace gave forth a cheerful, flickering blaze, which danced about the silver and glass, and on Anne's diamond rings. She never wore coloured stones. Pearls for her neck and diamonds on her fingers were all she affected. The judge had come home from circuit to-day, and Anne had made herself "like a king's daughter," as she declared, in his honour. He was the only person, she insisted, that she ever cared to dress for. Was he not the only man who appreciated simplicity and constancy of purpose? Strange to say, her new royal robes had been unremarked at first sight. The gold-embroidered fabric, which admirably became her, and which she wore for the first time, had excited no comment. To-night all her efforts to please, and she endeavoured much, as she saw how apathetic her father was, appeared unavailing. The judge did not smile with his customary appreciation of her airy, cynical remarks.

"Father, you have got on the frown which belongs to your big wig. Why did you forget to take it off?" she said saucily, when the servants had left the room. But he made no response or sign that he had heard The striking

features of the daughter were clearly inherited. None could mistake Anne for any other but the judge's child. She was a Mallison to the backbone, as her mother whispered privately to Hepzibah, with a regretful sigh. Publicly her ladyship did not make much vaunt of her City connection, preferring to allude to "the old Squire, Sir Edward's brother in Flatshire, you know," to strangers who could not know. "You haven't even a Boggis complexion, Anne, after all the trouble I took with your diet, and gossamer veils and sunshades. Now if there was one thing I could boast of, it was a fair skin. We didn't powder in my days, and milk and pearls were nothing to it at your age. There was Hepzibah, like a wax doll, all pink and white, who couldn't hold a candle to me. All her children are like her. But there, it was no good; it wasn't fashionable to be pale in my time. Men liked a good healthy colour."

Lady Mallison's reminiscences of her own complexion were apt to be tedious, and Anne yawned, and then smiled as she thought of her cousins. Hepzibah's family of well-complexioned daughters were the objects of her ridicule at times. Their round pink-and-white faces, with black beady eyes, gave them no slight resemblance to Dutch dolls. An erect, woodeny deportment, and certain angularity of elbows and shoulders, strengthened the likeness. Her mother's disparagement of her own clear brown skin and too easy attitudes failed to stimulate envy, as she called to mind the trio of blushing damsels.

Anne was certainly very like her father. She had the same high-bridged nose, with a nostril too full for feminine beauty, but not for intelligence or passion; the same broad

brow, a trifle too high for a woman, but which Anne, with discreet feminine vanity, shaded with her abundant brown hair. The judge had prominent bushy eyebrows, grizzled now, which made a pent-house for his piercing eyes. Nature had modified these in Anne's case to thick, straight lines, which gave her an air of severity. It was true Anne's eyes had not the keen, penetrating activity of her father's; they were larger, and appeared as though nothing in the world interested them or was worthy of their lengthened regard. She rarely looked closely or attentively at anything or anybody. Her would-be lovers and friends afar off declared that Anne had fine eyes, for they were large and clear, and wide apart. Her detractors, nearer at hand, could never bear their indifferent glance or cold disdain, and called them scornful and soulless. It was a fact that none of the passers-by in her life had the power to stir her emotion or interest. She did not put herself out of the way to please strangers. Her looks were not quickly brightened or shadowed by feelings of pleasure or anger. In the face of onlookers she was not animated or fascinating with the infinite variety of other women who laid themselves out to please. The judge had a thin-lipped, compressed mouth, with a long upper lip. Again Anne differed in feature from her father here. Yet it was possible that by-and-bye the curves of her more flexible lips might approach that moulding. The modelling of her chin betokened firmness, and a close mouth might come. There were moments now when she dropped her eyelids, turning pale and ceasing to speak, beneath the pressure of some strong emotion, when her lips took a straight, narrow line. But if she smiled suddenly a lovely

dimple was revealed, and the corners of her mouth curled and showed even, white teeth, which were pretty. The servants had withdrawn, and Anne, finding her first essay unavailing, had risen from her seat near the fire. She swept softly over the pile carpet towards her father's chair. Here she knelt down beside him to bring her face to a level with his own, resting her bare white arms on the table.

"Don't send me away, father, because I am too big to sit on your knee," she pleaded, softly. The judge's thin, nervous hand played with the nut-crackers, and he did not turn to look at Anne with his customary smile of indulgence.

She missed something, and drew her face back a little. Said her ladyship:

"Your nephew, Harry Mallison, has called twice, Edward, since you went on circuit. We are going to the Prince of Wales's Theatre with him to-morrow night. He has engaged a box for us, and will dine here first. I thought it would give you an early opportunity of seeing him. He is a most gentlemanly young man; quite a credit to the family."

Lady Mallison was studying her tablets, so did not catch the comic lifting of Anne's eyebrows, wherewith she sought to arrest her father's notice.

"Oh! ah! yes, my dear. Quite right to do the polite by relations. A butterfly without any wings, I suppose, at present. They were pretty well singed in Dublin. That was a sad mess he got into. I can't say that I like to see the family name figuring in the papers. How can he afford to take you to the play? Supplies from

Dullingford must be short for a time. What is this cousin of yours like, Anne? He was an unfledged boy when he went to India."

Anne laid her large, well-shaped hand—such a strongly possessive hand when it took hold of anything—upon her father's.

"I think he will fly by-and-bye again, father, but with no butterfly's wings next time."

Anne spoke with careless indifference.

"My wise young sibyl, forbear oracles at the close of an assize. Do you approve of your cousin?"

"Approve is a large word, father," she said.

Anne bore the sudden piercing regard fixed upon her with perfect composure, though not failing to notice a trace of anxiety in the question.

"I think most people would like him. You yourself will be won, I feel sure. He has pretty manners and frank blue eyes. Father, are frank blue eyes in the family? Why haven't I got them?" She paused, looking for a smile. She continued: "He doesn't pretend not to have been a fool, and, unlike most fools, doesn't boast that one experience has cured him of every kind of folly. But surely things have been more his misfortune than his fault. What kind of a bringing up had he? Uncle Henry is not the sort of father I should care to have."

Then Anne laid her soft cheek upon the hand she held.

"Well, well, this is something new, Anne, to hear you take the side of fools. You are more lenient to rogues, in a general way."

At this moment the door was thrown open. Anne,

starting, looked round as though in expectation of seeing a visitor behind the obese functionary who entered. Slowly she got up on her feet.

"Mr. Spencer to see you, sir. I have showed him into the library," said Croker, in tones of more than ordinary solemnity.

The judge was rarely hasty or uncourteous towards inferiors. There was, however, on this occasion a testy tone in his voice.

"Why did you do that, Croker? You are quite well aware that Mr. Spencer may always be admitted here. Show him in at once."

Mr. Croker closed the door with becoming dignity and silence, resenting the rebuke on an innocent man. The flavour of condescension in his tone as he opened the library door was quite perceptible to the visitor, who sat in semi-darkness with the gas turned down.

"Will you please to walk this way? The judge is ready to see you in the dining-room."

Croker cast a look of infinite derision upon the moreen bag which the visitor took up.

CHAPTER III.

JOHN SPENCER, the visitor who called in Portland Place at the unseasonable hour of nine o'clock, was not popular below stairs. There were certain appearances which told strongly against him in the estimation of high-souled menials.

"'Tain't the match as our young lady oughter demean herself to," was the unanimous opinion of the staff of domestics, from housekeeper to knife-boy. Wherein did this young man offend the delicate sensibilities of this fastidious body of critics? I cannot certainly deny that he wore shabby clothes, and that his hair was often rough and innocent of soothing unguents or aromatic oils. Moreover, he frequently ventured to call in muddy boots, with trousers tucked up,—that is to say, if he had not ridden in an omnibus as far as the Circus; and if he had, sometimes the damning testimony of stray straws adhered to his trousers. This was a worse indignity than offending boots. He, however, chiefly delighted in his legs, as a healthy man should. Still, physical energy expended in town is not *de règle*. In fact, pedestrian practices here are conclusive of poverty or parsimony. Do not some amongst us elevate their charming eyebrows, ladies well brought up do I know, if any young man has the singular taste to walk to a dinner party in the next square? After I tell you that John Spencer had on this particular night

travelled afoot from Lincoln's Inn Fields to Portland Place, with a well-stuffed black bag in his hand, perhaps you will resent his claims to your notice.

Anne had moved to the fireplace before the guest was ushered in. She stood with one foot on the fender and one elbow on the mantel-piece, which was a low one. Half turning round as the visitor entered, she rested her eyes on the crown of his head, and nodded coolly to him across the table. He made no effort to gain a warmer greeting by advancing a hand.

"Miss Anne she's that 'aughty in her manners as I never see. We don't have no cause to be afraid of that young man hanging about the house, for all the master favours him," pronounced Croker, unbending his severe demeanour of majesty, and delivering a knowing wink in the privacy of the housekeeper's room that evening.

Yet certainly, in spite of Anne's careless glance, John Spencer was a man worth looking at twice. In good sooth, he was a man. Not one of the dancing bipeds, not a gilded drawing-room *roi-fainéant*, an epitome of scandal and small talk, such as Anne secretly despised, though she appeared openly tolerant of. Indeed, she was sometimes almost gracious to such. To John Spencer Anne was never gracious. To be so might confess her inferiority; and he had a facility for making her feel that already. Not that he was aware of it. He certainly deserved a warmer greeting than the indifferent little nod bestowed upon him, for she had known him all her life, and they had not chanced to meet for a month. Had he offended her? Oh dear no! Was Lady Mallison surprised? Not at all. It was only one of Anne's ways. It might be

absence of mind or indolence. Who could tell why she did not smile or extend her hand with ordinary courtesy?

Lady Mallison herself was not particularly friendly in feeling towards the late caller, who had broken in upon the family party. She resented frayed shirt cuffs, and a tie often under his ear, as bordering on Bohemianism. She shook hands with the new comer, because it was her duty to exercise civil rites in her own house, but there was not much warmth of welcome in her replies to his remarks on the chilliness of the night.

"I suppose you have dined, Mr. Spencer? You see we are late this evening. The judge kept us waiting."

The fish had been over-boiled, and her ladyship wished to let her spouse know his sin.

"For a shave and a clean shirt, which you insisted upon, Clara, my love," interposed her lord with unusual asperity.

"Well, Edward, my dear, I'm sure you don't look respectable when you come home from circuit. How people in the law manage to accumulate dirt and dust about them in the way they do puzzles me." Luckily she could not see John Spencer's boots, but he was conscious of a disapproving glance fixed upon a crumpled shirt cuff.

"Who can touch pitch and not be defiled," murmured the judge *sotto voce*, leaning back with a gesture of weariness.

The younger man was quick to mark this unusual mood of langour, and promptly threw himself into the breach. Lady Mallison's monotonous reiterations of her complaints were familiar to him.

"I dined two hours ago, Lady Mallison, on a chop in chambers. I have been scouring the town ever since to pick up the news. If I unburden myself in her presence, Miss Anne will have the right to call me a scandal-monger."

Anne nodded her head slightly just to indicate she was listening. Her attitude was full of grace, her long limbs disposing the golden-shaded drapery in heavy folds. After his entry, and a salute that had nearly matched her own in point of indifference, John Spencer had not glanced in her direction. When Anne was quite sure he was not looking at her, she had turned her head slightly, and passed her eyes deliberately over him. After this long glance her foot tapped the fender for a few seconds.

The age of this man was not easy to decide. An incipient baldness on the crown of his head, which careless hairdressing served to betray, was set at naught by his youthful complexion. Fresh and rosy of hue, no lines about his eyes betrayed the marks of care or dissipation. His laugh was cheery, his appetite hearty, his frame athletic. He did not look his seven-and-thirty years. It could not be supposed that at any time he had been, or ever could be, given to sentimental reflections. For the rest, his sharp grey eyes, decided manners, and speech pronounced him a man of action, a man full of energy, under whose feet the grass would never grow.

Neither did his oratory belie the briskness of his manner. There was no tedious prolixity about it. He was famed for a clear and terse mode of address. Judges never sighed or looked morose when he stood up. At the bar he was already a risen light, and one of whom high

distinction was foretold. In early years he had been judge Mallison's ward, and the regard then established mutually had been fostered by years of intercourse in courts and out of them. His private means were small, but it was known he made a good income at the bar. A large part of his professional earnings went to the maintenance of a widowed mother and three sisters, who lived in the country. They lived luxuriously, and maintained a position in county society much to their own satisfaction. That there was any selfishness in accepting from John so large a share of his gains they never considered. What could John want with his money? He was not a society man, or a man of taste, or likely to marry.

For all it was known that John Spencer devoted his earnings to his family, he was a man smiled upon by mammas with daughters; and paterfamilias never debated whether it was worth while to give the best brand of after-dinner claret if John Spencer was to be the guest. If John took it into his head to marry, of course, it was said, Mrs. Spencer, senior, would have to cut down her carriage and retrench all round.

It was, however, a rare occurrence to meet this hard-working barrister in society. He was too busy, he pleaded, to accept invitations, or to devote any time to the set of a white tie. Dances he eschewed altogether, and dinner parties he was not much addicted to. Sometimes he could be persuaded to a friendly dinner if allowed to go away early, or now and then in the summer he would join a water party. The young ladies would then find out what stout muscles sent boats flying through the water. He could, in fact, row and shoot

with the best of men, though he made no vaunt of his prowess.

The only house favoured regularly by this young man's presence was the Mallisons' dwelling in Portland Place. Her ladyship's dinner cards invariably met with a prompt acceptance. He had besides a practice not approved of by the punctilious Clara of turning up at odd hours, unaccountable hours for callers, such as on the present occasion.

She was unwillingly compelled to condone these irregularities, as well as the condition of his clothes. He was well connected, having an uncle an hereditary Scotch peer, penniless it is true, but something better than a law-lord. Moreover, it was impossible to deny his cleverness. Edward pronounced absolutely on his capacity, and what authority so reliable as Edward's in forensic matters? The judge's wife had the grace to reverence humbly her husband's judgment in matters of law. Had he not accomplished great things with his wits, raising her from the obscurity of Boggis connections to the high heaven of Court society, and presenting her to the solemn grandeur of national judicature. She was a personage indeed in these days, of more importance even than a spiritual lord's wife. It was always with a chaste complacency that Lady Mallison reflected that the friend of her girlhood, Eliza Simper, was only plain Mrs. Meek, though united to a dignitary of the church no less than the Bishop of Bedmonstone.

She was accordingly respectful to her Edward's abilities, which had placed her on the superior platform. This was outside the domestic province. John Spencer she accepted

as a star on the authority of her astronomer, being herself ignorant of the nature of genuine lights. At the same time, she found space to be devoutly thankful that Anne showed no disposition to move as his satellite. Her proceedings were so unaccountable, her mind so difficult to follow, that it was just what she might have been expected to do.

When John Spencer opened the budget of his mind and began to talk, the judge rallied from his apathy. Many topics were glanced at, the younger man leading the conversation, and, to Anne's thinking, betraying his hand on the rudder a little too clearly. There was something he wished to avoid ahead. The girl, listening in silence, felt all the time that they were drawing nearer to the subject that interested her; yes, really interested her. Anne looked at the filberts on her mother's plate, and wondered how long they would last. Was there any pretext she could make for remaining in the room? She hated pretexts. She would so much rather say, "Father, I know you and John Spencer are going to talk about something I wish to hear all about."

But she knew, without direct evidence of the fact, that her father could not bear her to betray any acquaintance with criminal procedure. For some strange reason, a reason she never analysed, she took a deep interest in the course of justice. Of course it was unwomanly and morbid. She repeated this to herself; but still it did not quench the spirit of enquiry.

The case in point which she knew by-and-by would be touched on, was one of child-murder, which was of a sensational nature, having been dragged into the light of

public notice from exceptional circumstances surrounding it. The criminal had been of higher social standing than is frequent in such cases. She was a nursery governess. There had been a wild notion of revenge to be wreaked on her betrayer in the girl's crime. She had threatened to make him a by-word by a desperate deed, thereby giving evidence of a premeditated action. Ill-judging sentimentalists had taken the matter up, and the papers had enlarged on a cruel fate, setting forth the girl's youth and friendless circumstances. A desertion, not more cold-blooded than is frequent, was fully commented upon. In spite of popular sympathy given to the accused, the verdict had been a foregone conclusion. There seemed no reason even to recommend her to mercy. The evidence of an intended crime was too clear and damning. What lent an extra colour of romance to the matter was a passionate speech from the girl on her condemnation. An every-day case terminated with tragic emphasis. Those who were present reported the half-incoherent declamation to have been a fine piece of oratory. It was said that the Judge himself was moved to strange and overpowering emotion by that wild appeal to heaven, calling down bitter curses on those who forsook their victims. The trial had taken place on the previous day at the assize town where Anne's father presided, and the girl had eagerly read the report of it.

At last there was a silence between the two men. Lady Mallison had cracked her last nut and was sipping her port wine. Said Anne suddenly:—

"Mamma, have you made out your list for the dinner party on the 10th?"

The tablets came forth once more, and her ladyship was shortly deep in deliberation.

"I am glad your jury gave a rational verdict on the girl Rhodes," said John Spencer, under cover of Anne's diversion. He spoke in the undertone of one addressing a solitary listener, but the young lady leaning nonchalantly against the mantel-piece had quick ears. Her lips closed tightly; there was not the vestige of a curve about them now. The Judge poured out a full glass of claret before making a reply. His hand was not quite steady, for he spilt a few drops on the cloth. As he lifted it to the light, between himself and Anne, he glanced sharply towards her. She was toying with a hand-screen in an apparently unheeding mood.

"The evidence was quite clear; there could have been no other."

He spoke curtly, as if pushing an unwelcome topic aside. Anne thought there would be no more of it. Suddenly she lifted her eyes and met John Spencer's gaze upon her face.

"Well, I don't know, Sir Edward; I'm younger than you, but I've seen sentimental pity outweigh strong evidence. I quite expected a recommendation to mercy. For myself, I've no idea of tempering justice with mercy in these cases. Women are let off too easily now-a-days. All this fuss in the papers has gone a long way to convince ignorant people that Laura Rhodes is an injured martyr instead of an ungovernable fury. It was the deliberately considered deed of a female fiend."

At last Anne moved perceptibly. Her eyes threw a fierce challenge across the table as at an adversary. Yet

her voice was under command and full of the most cutting scorn when she spoke. Her words came slowly, gathering emphasis as she went on.

"I gave you credit always, Mr. Spencer, for having kept alive some human feelings, some spark of chivalry, in spite of the contaminating influences of courts of law. I see now I was mistaken. I do not often err, I fancy, in over-estimating other people's goodness, and I am not likely again to credit anyone unnecessarily with a heart! You earn your bread by the wrong-doing of others, literally feeding on corruption. I suppose it is not a wholesome diet, or calculated to foster humanity or benevolence, but——."

She caught her breath quickly, and paused. It was an extraordinary address from a young lady, and but for her tragic mien might almost have provoked a smile. The Judge looked towards her in undisguised amazement. In all her life, he had never seen Anne break out like this.

"Anne," he began, "how dare——." As she gazed at him in a steadfast way, without any fear, only with an anguished look, the words he intended to speak did not come.

"Pardon me, my dear sir," said John, waving his hand towards his senior, and standing up as if addressing a court.

"It is very unusual, Miss Anne, to find you taking notice of the course of events in this every-day world, the transactions of which you have always given me to understand, you utterly despise. Permit me to intimate to you that the case in point can hardly be understood by a young

inexperienced woman, or, at any rate, by a pure-minded one."

The blood rushed to Anne's face, to the colourless face, which no compliments or dissipation ever flushed. She made a slight gesture as of indignation too great for speech.

"Anne, my dear, how often have I begged you not to concern yourself about the criminal classes. When I have seen you poring over suicides and inquests in the papers, I have told you dozens of times that no lady of birth or position takes any notice of such cases. It's really shocking that my daughter cannot be made to see the impropriety, and the *vulgarity* of such tastes." Lady Mallison dabbled her fat fingers in her finger-glass, and rose from the table shaking out her velvet train, resolved to withdraw Anne at once from the danger of evil communications.

"Father, father, are you too against me?" said the girl, as her mother moved out of the room, pausing and resting one hand on the Judge's shoulder. Her eyes were wrathful, and her lips trembled with passion.

"Am I always to live in a world of frivolity and pleasure, a merry-go-round, mechanical and monotonous, which demands no effort from me, and only makes me sick at heart? Is there to be no deep interest, no sacrifice, no task in life except smiling and looking beautiful for women born well-off and prosperous like me? Am I always to be shut from the knowledge of human cares and sufferings? Is the breath of other people's misfortunes never to touch me? Am I to feel no pity for those who are wounded, who fall by the wayside, who are led astray?

This is not *life*, this lotus-eating existence. I, too, like other women, was born to suffer and to feel, to help to relieve others' pain. Why should I bear no burden, look at no sin or sorrow? Life is tasteless, full of weariness, because of this. I have no human interests. I am fed on the stones of worldly pleasures, fine clothes and good days. I have never been allowed to grow in a healthy way. Oh, you know it, you must know it. I have been trimmed, and pruned, and clipped till the feelings in me scarcely know how to rise or shape themselves. Sympathy and charity have been dammed up till they have turned bitter. I hardly can see what is real and true."

The Judge moved a little, and Anne hid her face in her hands with a sob.

"Father, do not turn from me. You have never turned from me, though you have always been too busy to see my sufferings. I know that you have a heart; that even you as a judge can suffer in condemning. That woman yesterday; you pitied her, even the paper said as much. All men are not cruel and severe like John Spencer. Oh, I have felt what it must be to be ignorant, poor, forsaken; to have trusted and to have had your trust betrayed. Father, do not shudder so—I will not pain you. I will be gentle. But let me look at such things if I will; let me understand life if I can. There is so much foolishness and wrong in the world because people don't rightly understand. I am not weak-minded or romantic. Why may not a pure-minded woman see clearly? Do you think the angels could rejoice so greatly over the lost sheep that is found, if they did not see clearly all its sinful wanderings?"

For a moment Anne bowed her head lower, and clung with frantic energy to her father's breast. He caressed her silently, but his hands were palsied as if with fear, and the deathly pallor of his face alarmed the younger man. Presently Anne recovered herself, and raising her head, passed, without looking at John Spencer, out of the room.

"You are agitated, Judge; your nerves are out of order; you work too hard," said the barrister with assumed carelessness.

Sir Edward's glass clicked against his teeth as he raised it, but by a strong effort he regained composure. For the space of a few minutes the two men avoided looking at each other. Then they spoke on indifferent topics, though each was full of wonder concerning Anne and her extraordinary paroxysm of passion. John Spencer had nursed Anne Mallison on his knee as a little girl, and she had rebelled against him, defying his authority, but always in a dignified way, never with intemperate heat or anger. Her want of control now was a strange manifestation of hidden fires.

CHAPTER IV.

HARRY MALLISON, the cousin spoken of at the Judge's dinner-table, was the eldest son of a well-known squire in Flatshire, the hero of many ardent young ladies' dreams, and altogether a popular member of society. Men dubbed him a good all-round fellow; that is to say, he was not quarrelsome by disposition, and was generally ready to take a bet or lend a horse. He was a fair shot, an active tennis player, fond of polo, addicted to dancing, flirtation, and all things that tend to make life pleasant to young manhood. In all his sports he had the grace to excite no jealousy, not becoming unpardonably perfect in any one line of action. He had on his return from India, got his troop in his regiment, but the trammels of military duties were too many for his pleasure-loving mind, and he had at this time fully resolved to cut the service. At the present moment the shadow of a disgraceful transaction was lingering about him, and he could not afford to send in his papers without appearance of retreat before the breath of scandal.

This young man considered himself aggrieved by a hostile fate, which decreed him an allowance unequal to his expectations. The squire, who tenanted the quiet old Elizabethan mansion at Dullingford, only granted his heir five hundred a year, which, with a prospective income of five thousand, was clearly inadequate to meet his every-

day requirements, much less to leave a margin for his pleasures. Who could keep hunters on a beggarly allowance of that amount? It was barely enough to supply the common necessaries of life. A fellow must have loose cash at his disposal. Thus it came to pass that young Captain Mallison had many bills about. His tailor, and bootmaker, and cigar merchant waited with the long-suffering patience of those who deal with eldest sons.

At the age of fifty, some years back, Henry Mallison, senior, had taken it into his head, which was a very obstinate one, to espouse a lady some years his junior. He had been a widower from Harry's childhood, and society had long given over any expectation of turning him from the error of a celibate life. It therefore came upon the county as a surprise, when he returned from a visit to London with his solicitor's daughter as his wife. Naturally, sundry elderly virgins of birth and position in the district were aggrieved at this introduction of a foreign and plebeian element, and Mrs. Mallison number two never succeeded in winning popularity or establishing her position. All the sympathies went with young Harry—so comely, so pleasant, and withal so tolerant of his father's folly. In the course of time Mrs. Mallison most inconsiderately presented the Squire with three fine boys. It became necessary to put by a sum annually for this second family. The cold looks of the county mattered little to the squire's worthy partner after her mind had been cast into the mould of economy. Few invitations entailed few returns of hospitality, and furthered her inclination. After the frugal-minded lady had begun to devote her attention to parsimonious practices, Harry was given to understand that he must not

indulge in any extravagances which would be likely to rob his half-brothers of their portions.

At the present time the old Squire was a hale man of about sixty. The economies practised in his dietary had the favorable result of checking the family gout and counteracting liver ailments. It is an ill wind that blows none any good; and though, probably, when Mr. Mallison visited his brother in Portland Place, he was fully alive to the good quality of the wines set before him, as well as the agreeable nature of skilfully concocted sauces, he did not demur, on returning to his own roof, to a wholesome discipline of milk puddings and plain roast and boiled. He made it no ground of complaint against his spouse that nothing out of season ever found its way to table, and that the fish, flesh, and fowl served to him were the produce of his own field, farmyard, and preserves.

Young Harry never for an instant contemplated the possible injustice of being ousted from his birthplace. Dullingford had gone down from father to eldest son for half a dozen generations; but, at the same time, the estate not being entailed, it was hardly possible to raise money on his prospects, and he found it necessary to maintain amicable terms with his father. Not but what he would have told you that he sincerely respected this parent. They had no tastes in common, it is true, but this was a young man, before all things of good intentions and some natural feeling. When he erred, as he would confess, it was from a too easy yielding, a good-natured desire to please or make happy some other. Occasionally, people who lack principle do ascribe their instability to a natural warm-heartedness or

excess of feeling. No doubt it is a comfortable sort of deception. I may almost declare that Harry was a young man of good intentions, even more than inclinations. His natural leanings were evidently towards good, for he would go out of his way to do a kind action or to offer friendly consolation. He would lend friend Tom fifty pounds to-day, even when he knew friend Dick expected him to pay up a borrowed hundred to-morrow. Friend Tom's dire necessity came first, and feeling prevailed, while the principle of rectitude went to the wall. Men liked young Mallison as a rule, for he was capital company, lively, and full of healthy activity. As for women, the present favorites were always ready to uphold his fascinations and agreeable manners. What mattered a few forgotten or forsaken ones making their moan in the background? Harry liked people to smile upon him and welcome his appearance. He generally got out of the way of cold looks or reproaches. He never resisted the soft glances of fair women, and was always ready to whisper pretty speeches, which, for the good of his soul, he had better have left unsaid. But self-restraint and control were unknown to him. It delighted him to see a fluttering breath, to mark a blush at his approach, to hear a quiver in a gentle voice. Such things were to him seals of approbation, and before all things Harry was in love with himself.

Recently his name had been breathed unfavourably upon. He had got himself mixed up in a gambling scandal, and, having to appear as a witness on a court-martial, there had somehow been discredit reflected upon him. By the help of his evidence, a subaltern, his own

most familiar friend, was cashiered. There had been a drunken row, a noisy quarrel, and other disgraceful circumstances connected with the matter. The suspicion of cheating at cards had been thrown upon the younger officer, too drunk to recollect what happened. Many had been concerned in the affair, and as gambling in the regiment had been for some time past a growing evil, the matter had been thoroughly investigated. Certainly, Harry also had lost a big sum, for the old Squire had been telegraphed for to Dublin in terms which left him no alternative but to go. He had cleared his son's name of the debt of honour, with the assurance that it was the last time that he should lend any assistance to such. Having been set upon his feet, a temporary absence from the scene of action appeared advisable to Harry. He was now sojourning awhile in London, spreading his own version of the matter in the circles he most affected. But, somehow, there was a shade less of cordiality extended to him by the members of various clubs than he recollected of yore.

Since the days of Anne's childhood he had been on foreign service till within the last year. He had returned after a long absence, to find his legal connections stars of very respectable magnitude in the firmament of London society, and the long-legged, quiet girl of fourteen grown into a stately young woman, who went to Court, and was by some considered a beauty. Anne's serene calm towards his pleasantries, and her refusal to encourage familiarity, struck him at a first interview as a novelty. She had declined to remember the incidents of childhood he recalled, and had turned a careless ear to his most subtle compliments. The bait of personal flattery was always unavailing

with Anne. He began to wonder what manner of woman this was. His experience of chattering young ladies who kept the ball of chaff and repartee going, of fast young women who talked slang, hunted, smoked, and flirted, was large. He had looked on touzle-headed virgins, who languished, made angles with every limb, and talked metaphysics. He was acquainted with the man-hater and the levelling spinster, who sported thick boots, and was suspected of wearing the divided garment. All the wily Delilahs,—the widows, maidens, garrison hacks of a varied circle of acquaintance, were not difficult to read, to please, or to win. But this self-contained, cynical cousin, who looked unutterably bored when he spoke, and took no notice when he smiled upon her, was a phenomenon. His was the voice of a charmer that none had ever refused to listen to, and here was she, keeping him at the distance of the most casual acquaintance, after real exertions on his part to please. Of course, you must understand he is good-looking. Probably you have ticketed him a young scoundrel, at a first inspection. He was nothing of the sort. There are dozens, scores, like him in this world, whom you meet every day, more or less attractive, and influential in consequence. You do not call them villains, nor does anyone else. They are entertaining companions, pleasant to look at, ready to please, and we all speak well of them—generally love them, if we are not betrayed by them in some palpable manner. Even then we often forgive them.

Of course her cousin took good care that Anne should have no suspicion of any unusual efforts to conciliate in his manner towards her. On the occasion of a second call

she was languidly attentive to his conversation, and remembered that he did not take sugar in his tea. Harry had a touch of the coxcomb in his composition, and took this recollection as a favourable omen. In reality, it was no exceptional attention on Anne's part. She had the happy knack of remembering the tastes of those she met. At a third interview, when the young man came by Lady Mallison's invitation to lunch, Anne actually smiled twice, and her eyes rested more than once with approval upon him. That was satisfactory, for he was comely as young Adonis, and gauged his own charms at full worth; but he could not quite fathom the speculative glance which, when they were left alone in the drawing-room after luncheon, rested from time to time upon him. Anne did not look quite satisfied then.

Did Harry mean anything in these first advances? Certainly, when he called, a stranger in Portland Place, he had no intention of doing court to his cousin. I will not assert that matrimony had not made itself clear to him as a desirable goal—matrimony with an heiress, or one, at any rate, who could amply supplement his needs. Yet Harry was not so mercenary as to be willing to sell himself to one either old or ugly who would be able or willing to give him of her store. At the first interview, Harry certainly was surprised to find Anne had developed into a beautiful woman, and her indifference undeniably piqued him.

He was not at all sure about his intentions after a second meeting. Of course, Anne would have heaps of money: there was all the Boggis fortune as well as the Judge's savings to come to her. No inconsiderable amount had been put away in his Q.C. days, as Harry had heard

his father say. The young soldier began to think it might not be such a bad thing. He might go further and do worse. Anne was handsome, without doubt, though for choice he preferred a *mignonne* little face, all sparkles and animation, with a fairy figure, and small hands that gesticulated, or feet that stamped on trifling provocations. There was an excitement in taming one of these fiery little shrews, full of passion, but usually without much wit. He did not care for wit, especially if it took an intellectual form. It was reported that Anne was clever. That was a drawback, certainly. Neither could he enjoy the satisfaction of taming such a wife if he wedded with her. There would be little variety about such a companionship, for Anne would never fly into a temper, or flash those cold eyes of hers fiercely. Like Lady Mallison, Harry began to consider regretfully the superior charms of "infinite variety."

"Confound the girl! If she'd been decently civil to me, I should never have thought of marrying her," he said to himself, convinced that opposition and coldness had fanned the flickering flame of his desire.

Certainly Anne would look well at the head of a table. Her stately manners might not be so much amiss in a hostess. Without doubt his father would be pleased at such a prospect as a marriage with his cousin. In the event of such a match taking place, his allowance would certainly be increased, might even be doubled. "To him that obtaineth shall be given," Harry knew well was a law rigidly respected by all parents. Then the young man reflected that it was possible that the Judge might not receive him as a son-in-law with any exalted

enthusiasm. Still, if Anne came to love him, he was sure she would hold obstinately to a determination. Lady Mallison, he never doubted, could be won to his side by a little judicious flattery. The more Harry looked at the prospect opening before him, the better he liked it. If he carried out his intention of quitting the service he must marry, and it was incumbent on him to marry money. Here was a fortune ready for him to lay his hand upon, a fortune which it would be sinful to suffer to go out of the family. Perhaps you think it was strange that this young man took Anne herself into so little consideration. In fact, he was so accustomed to be successful with women, that he never doubted his own power to win her. As he made a studiously neat bow of his white tie on the evening that he was to dine in Portland Place, he contemplated his own image in the light of a conquering hero.

Harry was very attentive to matters of dress, also the trimming of his nails, the twist of his moustache, and the scent of his toilet articles. His eye falling on the theatre tickets on his dressing-table, he wondered if the Judge would take it into his head to accompany the ladies to the play. He devoutly hoped not. Since his return from India he and his uncle had not met, but Mr. Harry had a very distinct recollection of certain austere glances cast upon him in his youth after wild escapades. Besides, as he intended to besiege a certain fair citadel, it would be better that a breach should be made in the walls before any enemy got near enough to spike his guns.

Captain Mallison had by this time been enough about town to hear his cousin's name mentioned. Members of

the Clubs, returned from shooting raids or foreign travels, for winter sittings, in the saddle, or at the fireside in their own dear foggy country, discussed Miss Mallison in a way which rather surprised Harry, and certainly enhanced her value. Anne herself, who did not know a third of her admirers or detractors by sight, might have been astonished to learn her own reputation. One had met her at Homburg in August. Another had seen her in September stalking over the moors in the Highlands. The Mallisons had then been staying with Lord Clanroy, John Spencer's uncle. Her age, her looks, her unwillingness to wed at the end of a third season, were commented on. The opinion was that she waited for a big fish.

"She'd be a deuced uncomfortable sort of fireside divinity, as chaste as ice, as pure as snow," scoffed one young cynic, knocking the ashes from his cigar in a vindictive way.

"Yet, Sinclair, she doesn't escape calumny. Allow me to remind you she is my cousin."

Captain Mallison smiled complacently, not looking at anyone in particular of the half-dozen men assembled in the smoking room, but giving a general idea that he was ready to challenge the first disparaging remark. The cynic's demeanour took a more crestfallen appearance. He sucked away vigorously at his cigar without making a response.

This was the afternoon of the day Harry had lunched in Portland Place, and methinks he was already presuming on the lady's mind. If women could but hear the braggart speeches of their meekest slaves and courtiers when released from the humiliating bondage of their

presence, there would be a sad undoing of smiles and pretty words of consolation. A very stirring game of consequences would ofttimes result.

"Don't make your sauce before you've caught your fish, my friend!" thundered a great voice in the rear, with a mighty guffaw of enjoyment. "Lift up your head, Teddy Sinclair, my boy. You may dance those pretty toes of yours into an heiress's favour yet. Harry Mallison is not going to walk over this course, cousin or no cousin, I bet."

"Faraday! By Jove, where do you hail from? Well met, old chap." A chorus of voices welcomed the new arrival, one or two smokers even rising to shake him by the hand.

"Well, ain't I just in the nick of time to hear this cockerel frightening a whole roost of better birds. Have you got your spurs on, Captain Mallison."

There was an angry menace in the man's voice as he turned upon Harry. The young man's wits were quick, and he rapidly put two and two together to account for this change of attitude in a former friend. Probably Faraday knew more than the rest did about that Dublin row. For, though he had been absent from Europe at the time when it occurred, he was a near connection of Harry's disgraced comrade. There had been something in that transaction which made this young soldier uneasy in the presence of those who suspected him. There was nothing definite to be laid to his charge, no shadow of evidence to prove anything against him; but yet, a miasma which was not pleasant every now and again enveloped him, and we

know that men suspected of treachery or duplicity never regain their old footing in others' esteem, or re-establish popularity. The unwritten code of honour is a blessed safeguard.

Now, Harry dreaded lest the contagion of suspicion should spread. To be "hail fellow, well met," at mess or club, was life and happiness to him. As the breath of his nostrils were the friendly shakes of the hand, the clap on the shoulder, the "old fellowing" of his friends and companions. To his pleasure-loving nature, that all men should praise him was supreme glory and satisfaction. He basked in the smiles and popularity of the hour, forgetting that good nature and ready wit strike no deep roots like faithfulness, and honour, and truth.

Faraday was a mighty hunter in the Rocky Mountains, bluff in manner and rude in speech, not over-popular, except when he had been away on a lengthened trip. Then the roughness of his tongue was condoned, considering he might have information to give, or amusing stories to tell. His fund of racy anecdotes seemed inexhaustible after his excursions.

"Oh, for some news!" sighs our club-man, like the Athenian of old, who, unhappy mortal, had no contemporary *Truth* at his side, or *World* open at his feet. If some one had only somehow got to the moon and killed a strange animal, or discovered a new sport, what a hero he would become on a wet afternoon!

Faraday had not been to the moon, only up some high mountains; but he was made welcome because he was certain to be well primed with American tall stories. Though addressed so roughly and aggressively, and though

the last words, he felt sure, were significant to the whole room, Harry Mallison maintained a smiling and invincible front. The trepidation that was in him was not evident in his frank blue eyes, which never flinched. He did not put out his hand to the new comer, as some of the other men had done. It probably would have been dashed aside with an oath, for Faraday was not always nice in his choice of words. Looking with careless indifference over the head of the man who appeared resolved to declare himself an enemy, Harry had the appearance of scorning to notice ungentlemanly conduct. His quiet ease of manner and undisturbed serenity gave him an advantage. But, under stress of this unlooked-for attack, he resolved inwardly that, come what might, he would make Anne love him, or marry him. In that direction he would give an incontestable proof of victory. Faraday meant to insult him, but this was not the time to avenge an insult.

"Miss Anne Mallison, the Judge's daughter, your cousin, is she? I met her many a time last season; walked her in to dinner once. A well-plucked one, that woman, I dare swear, for all she don't brag much. I didn't think she was of your blood. It must have got mixed somehow. She's no coward. Not a windmill likely to turn to your bellows. She'll keep big birds of prey at a distance."

The insolent meaning of the man's speech was evident. There were one or two present who hoped Harry Mallison would show fight on this occasion, but his pacific mood and silence towards the aggressor disappointed them. His gentlemanly manner of ignoring the bullying tone taken

by Faraday, in the opinion of others, placed him on a higher platform. The brawling disposition of his adversary had never appeared so obnoxious to his fellows. Under the circumstances, Harry displayed unheard of courage in submitting to be called a coward.

CHAPTER V.

It was with the offensive remarks of Faraday ringing in his ears that Harry Mallison went forth from his club, further incited to do battle for what now seemed a greater stake. The lists were open to him, and this young man was possessed of the one thing needful to successful courtship, namely, confidence in himself. Women, it is true, are in the habit of loudly commending modesty in men. But all the evidence of courts of love goes far to prove that presumption is a readily pardoned sin. To be coy or to lose their time is a much more deadly offence. Why, bless us! they, in their sweet vanity, put any rash confidence down to ardour in the chase, to overmastering love and the power of their bewildering charms. A backward swain who can bear? He may beat his breast and tear his hair, robbed of all rest in the solitude of his chamber, while his successful rival peacefully sleeps the slumber of a confident man.

But the fair one dreams of the warm pressure of her hand, the bold appropriation of her glove, the significant kissing of the flower she has worn, perchance of her own sweet lips. Not a doubt of it, the bold wooers have the best of it.

When Captain Mallison, on the evening of the dinner, had done battle with three white ties, his attempt with a fourth proved successful. The parting of his hair was

irreproachable, and his moustache had a most irresistible twist. Jumping into a hansom outside his lodgings in Jermyn Street, he reached the Portland Place house some five minutes before he was due. The relationship with his host warranted the breach of etiquette, and Miss Mallison was dressed and waiting.

Anne was quite alone in the drawing-room when he was announced. She was not occupied about anything in particular. Her hands were lying on her lap, and her eyes were fixed on the fire, though an open magazine on a table at her elbow seemed to imply she had been reading. Under the present aspect, Harry began to think he would need no incentives to make love to her. She was very fair to see, and there was something brighter and more animated about her manner and appearance than he had observed before. She was half reclining on a low chair with a receding back, her head propped against the cushion, with her round chin turned upwards, and a beautifully modelled throat uncovered. Her white gown, of some soft stuff, was cut out at the neck, and she wore curious Etruscan ornaments. She only half rose as her cousin came near to her, but she smiled a welcome as he took her hand. That he held it for a moment longer than was needful she scarcely appeared to notice, for she did not colour or make the faintest effort to withdraw it.

But she did not sink back into her previous easy posture when there was no longer an excuse for him to retain her unresponsive fingers. Thus she made it felt in a subtle way that cousin Harry must keep his distance. The young man gave no sign of discomfiture, though inwardly nettled by her coldness. He knew at once that he must not

presume a hair's-breadth on any favour shown him. There would have been a pretty little scene, thought he, with any other young woman of ordinary sensibilities—a blush, a glance, a slight struggle to withdraw a fluttering hand, an episode sufficient to have established an embarrassing understanding. The beginnings of finger-touches which thrill, the exchange of looks, imperceptible to onlookers, carry an outside wall occasionally. But how the deuce was he to get on here? He was familiar with love, and knew by heart the laws which governed and controlled it. He had learnt how to fetch and carry to woman's liking, to evade, to plead, to scheme successfully where they were concerned; but he did not know how to meet his cousin's way of looking and acting. This was a new procedure which he could not understand. Anne might construe his actions according to a code of her own with which he was not acquainted.

"You will see papa to-night. He came back yesterday. You must learn to like my father. He will give you very sound advice if you trust him, Captain Mallison."

Harry drew up a chair to the fire.

"Before I went away I used to be cousin Harry," he said quite incidentally; continuing, without pausing, "I might not follow his advice so implicitly. There is a great satisfaction in choosing one's Mentor."

Anne looked at him with a steady glance. Her eyebrows came down slightly.

"I will call you Harry, if you like it better. Why should I not? But I always forget you are my cousin." Then she paused, and Harry wondered if this forgetfulness was a favourable chance. Anne bent forward again to speak,

this time with a more impressive glance of appeal than he had seen in her eyes. She could warm to earnestness, then.

"But, please, I want you to understand that I do not like to be anyone's conscience-keeper. Since you were here last I have been thinking of what you told me of your affairs, and how things go wrong with you from too easy yielding. I have no right to be anyone's guide. It makes the responsibility of my own idleness, of my own unwise thoughts, too heavy to bear. It is as if I was setting myself up as better than other people when you ask me to advise you."

It is a subtle flattery skilfully used by some men this making women responsible for what they call their redemption. Harry had at the last interview been alone with Anne for half an hour. Instinctively, or by good luck, he had fallen on her ideas of reforming some one, or something. They were well-concealed ideas generally, for she had not the courage to defy ridicule. To be the saviour of some forsaken soul, the light to one in darkness, or the prop to one that stumbled, were visions which Anne did look on secretly. She was so tired of her life as a spoilt child, but yet what remained to her but to go on in this treadmill of pleasure?

At the last meeting the conversation between Anne and her cousin had touched on the Dublin losses at play, and he, sure that no rumours to his discredit, beyond the fact of gambling, could have reached her ears, construed the whole matter to her in a way which gained her pity. He confessed his weakness under temptation, and seemed to make appeal against her harsh judgment. It was a manly

acknowledgment in the main, not too profuse of regret or promise of amendment.

"What can a man do with cards always at his elbow, and betting books fluttering before him? I shall cut the service," he said in conclusion, looking at her for a sign of approval. But though he had tried to put her in the place of counsellor, confiding his difficulties to her with that charming candour of address which won so many women's sympathy, Anne had not definitely taken him to task or offered any decided advice. Still, without her consciousness of it, his admissions, and the confidence placed in her, had forged a link between them. Here was a topic that was a very good foundation to build on, and he was quite prepared to revert to it when they were alone. Anne herself gave the opening on this occasion. Shrewd as she was in some ways, she fell unwittingly into the trap placed for her. Harry had exalted her on a pedestal of strength and power, and looked for counsel and help from her. She was to be his good angel.

"But, Anne, you can tell me what I ought to do. You see, there is no one that cares. I might go to the dogs altogether now, and there's another to take my place at Dullingford. It's hard lines on a fellow to have no women folks of his own to keep him straight. I've knocked about the world since I was eighteen, with never a hand stretched out to help me."

Then this young man got up and stood over Anne, looking down at her, with eyes which really had a look of mournful regret in them, and with a thrill in his voice which argued some genuine feeling.

"What can I say to do you any good, or to help you?

It must be terrible to feel you can't undo the wasted years of your life," said Anne gently, with evident distress, accepting his emotion as painful. "You promised, at any rate, you would not touch cards again. Surely you have not broken your word since last week?" she added, a sudden suspicion sharpening her voice.

"Indeed you are hard upon me, Anne. Did you think I should break my word to you?"

He stooped a little towards her, and as he did so her uplifted gaze fell slowly. Not with any embarrassment, though his look was full of meaning. Anne was destitute of that self-consciousness which is always on the alert in small-souled women to refer glances and meanings to individual merit. She scarcely noticed the emphasis in his eyes which he dared not lay on his words. She turned away from him simply because it was not habitual for her to look long at anyone. But Harry did not so construe her averted gaze.

"Why not to me, as well as anyone else?" she said, indifferently. "Having a faithful conscience cannot depend on any special person. Ah, here is papa. Good evening, my lord; you are late." Anne rose up with majesty, and swept her father a courtesy of mock deference, smiling beautifully. Perhaps she was glad of the interruption which put an end to a *tête-à-tête*. The Judge entered with the stiff and starched demeanour he usually adopted towards strange young men prowling about his one ewe lamb. Anne knew quite well the significance of this deportment, and generally secretly rejoiced over it. This evening there was a degree more of cast-iron about her father than usual, inasmuch as the guest was a reputed

wolf. The young man endured the frigid ordeal of the first five minutes with admirable serenity. Anne wondered if he had any idea that this was not her father's ordinary manner. Captain Mallison's tactics had not been considered beforehand, nor was his address at all studied to conciliate Anne's parent. Had they, however, been so, the method he adopted was the one most likely to ingratiate him with his uncle. He at once slipped into an attitude of easy familiarity, without any appearance of playing the part of a repentant sinner. Harry was at his best at this moment, and Anne herself found that she was admiring his easy, genial manners, without a touch of that *brusquerie* which offended her in John Spencer. The Judge presently thawed to the young man of his blood and of his name, who had the family features, and who inherited the gestures and voice of his grandfather. Also, Harry was ready with a smart answer, and parried an attack with astonishing quickness. He put away from the conversation all that was dangerous.

Now, as a rule, brilliant barristers and learned judges do not let off fireworks of retort, or pour out logic in the family bosom. The coruscations of these noble intelligences only gleam in the newspaper, I am happy to assure an ignorant public. But this judge with whom we have to do was a man of many parts, and of a versatile mind. He was a linguist and a scholar, but withal a man of the world, qualified to look at life from sides which were not judicial. The intelligence of his young relative distracted him agreeably and unexpectedly. It is not usually anticipated of martial tongues to discourse varied tunes. The after-dinner

speeches of Bellona's sons are not replete with thought and wit. But this young man had picked up information wherever he went, and really could more than hold his own at ordinary dinner tables. He told one or two good stories new to the Judge, stories apposite and brief, at the same time proving himself capable of listening to others. The dinner was a success. One story provoked another. The Judge, in high good-humour, related incidents of his early life that Anne had never heard.

"Ah, by-the-bye," he began once, "that reminds me of what once happened when I was in Spain——"

Anne paused in the act of helping herself to sea-kale. "Papa, I never knew you had been in Spain!" she interrupted, with amazement. Lady Mallison also appeared aggrieved at her own ignorance of this circumstance.

"And pray, Edward, when did these travels take place?"

The Judge looked from wife to daughter with a half-derisive gleam in his eyes. He appeared to have forgotten his story.

There was a dry caustic in his speech when he spoke, in a voice of concentrated quietness:

"Ah, well, my dears, I have no doubt there are a good many things you have yet to learn."

Anne interposed with calm conviction.

"But not about you, papa."

"Even about me, my daughter, it may be. Am I such a very open book to you, my love?" he said, with a half sneer.

Somehow or other the inquiries about Spain were hushed, and Anne went on with her sea-kale. Yet on the

whole the meal passed off pleasantly, and Harry felt himself fairly embarked on an enterprise after a golden fleece, with paternal and maternal breezes filling his sails. For her ladyship, who did not specially love the theatre, being urged to it mainly by fashion and culture, even suffered with a good grace this well-mannered young man to cloak her and envelope her in the mysterious windings of a woollen head-dress. Anne remembered John Spencer once taking them to see Irving, and recalled with a smile how he had nearly strangled her mother in this performance of shawling. At the last moment, as the party stood in the hall, Anne's fan was missing. The Judge heard her say, going down to the carriage on Harry's arm:

"You really must teach me how to use a fan, Harry."

"Like they do in Spain, with a pretty language behind a flutter. Ah, yes, I learnt all that in my excursions from Gibraltar."

His light laugh floated back to the Judge, who stood under the hall lamp watching their departure. The carriage door was shut. The footman mounted the box. Anne called out "Good-night, papa," and the wheels rolled away. Croker prepared to draw in the roll of matting. At that moment a slight, girlish figure, draped in black, wearing a sort of loose head-dress, paused on the pavement to allow of this manœuvre. The Judge's looks rested upon her. Naturally she turned her gaze towards the open door and brilliant light streaming from within. The girl had lustrous dark eyes set in a pale, oval face. The carpeted hall, adorned all round with bronzes and marbles, the broad staircase, the many pictures, were suggestive of luxury, wealth, and comfort. Her step lingered while her

glance searched the illuminated recesses. The dining-room door was open, and she had a glimpse of silver and china dishes piled with gorgeous fruits. She gave no heed to the figure within the doorway, taking the master for another servant. She had seen the family whirled away in a smart equipage.

"My God!" said the Judge, under his breath, "how like!" He passed his hands over his eyes a moment, and when he looked out into the darkness once more, the little figure with the graceful gait of a southern-bred woman had disappeared beneath the curtain of the night. The Judge went outside and looked up and down the street. He came back presently with an unsatisfied frown, and signed to the butler to close the door. He sat awhile in his own sitting-room, staring into the fire. He held out his hand and looked at it. He trembled in a nerveless way. He rose and looked at himself in a small mirror.

"Has all this talk of Spain caused me to see ghosts?" he muttered to himself, pacing the room. "I shall be haunted by every criminal I condemn next. Most certainly I must have Brodrick to see me to morrow."

Sir Joshua Brodrick was the most eminent brain doctor of the day.

CHAPTER VI.

A SERVANT'S registry office is not the pleasantest of waiting-rooms, and yet we who go thither as employers see only the better side of it. We grumble probably at being kept a quarter of an hour in some fairly furnished parlour while we review the most approved candidates for our favour. What can we be expected to know of bare, comfortless apartments below stairs, where scores of weary women sit, hour after hour, patiently waiting on the chance of an interview with some captious mistress? For the sake of undergoing a critical cross-examination, a series of close inquiries which may only bring their demerits to light, they endure, day after day, the same monotonous waiting upon fate. If they are short in their replies beneath repeated aggravations of inquiry, they meet with a summary dismissal. If they are not becomingly abashed at the presence of a superior, and present a too cheerful countenance to work, they must be light and flippant. When thin and small, they must be delicate; when stout and strong-limbed, they are certain to be clumsy. If fair to look at, they are dangerous on account of followers; but if they are ugly, Mr. Brown or Robinson objects to be served by ill-looking wenches. Oh, women! if you took into consideration a little more often that those who serve you are not mere goods and chattels, hired without consciousness; that they are something better than stocks

and stones, insensible to your remarks, it would be better for you and them. These are living, breathing creatures, who think and feel precisely as you do, who cherish hopes and desires similar in their station to you in yours. These are sentient beings, who have dispositions, characters, tastes, frailties, of a kindred nature to your own.

Your daughter Jane has no figure, it may be, but she laces tight and wears admirably fitting gowns, which will not let her look clumsy; but, for all that, her hands and feet are a reproach amongst women. Sweet little Emily, the pride of your heart, is a shocking coquette, and has her admirers calling in numbers daily; ay, and she is suffered, often enough, to receive them alone, without her character being called into question. Of course, Matilda is sulky when papa gives her business letters to copy out. The dear girl is longing to get on with her *arasene* work, and naturally objects to inking her fingers for the sake of saving a copying press. Oh, mothers and daughters! look at home, and be less harsh and exacting towards those you engage to serve you.

What cultures and trainings have the most of your dependents had to teach them to be tolerant of you? The young women of your rearing are, likely enough, quick-tempered, extravagant, frivolous virgins. All the service of tender mother love and care has left them a long way behind perfection. Yet, for wages of money, you demand virtues which affection cannot win. Your servants must exercise self-restraint, be sober, discreet, and laborious. In them the hasty answer is the crime of impertinence, or insubordination not to be overlooked; the foible of vanity an unpardonable sin; love and

courtship beyond their duty certainly, beyond their right most clearly.

Maria Garcia had been in attendance in Great Prince's Street for more than an hour, and her Spanish heart waxed hot and wrathful beneath the ordeal of patient submission. The superintendent, a lady of the Jewish persuasion, was busy in an upper story, with a secretary at her right hand. Ladies were ushered into this audience-chamber in unbroken succession. Some of these employers of labour were tedious, bringing out note-books, and demanding certificates without end. Others merely entered their requirements, and swiftly passed out. Meanwhile, those who hoped to be employed sat in rows in a lower court, reviling fate and the weather alternately. Now and again, one was summoned to the presence-chamber above, and the number was diminished. It was a dull November day, and many of those assembled here were exiles from some bright land, where, even in winter time, the sun was seen, and the air was balmy. The light, the little that ever penetrated here, only reached this dreary apartment through a window of ground glass. Still, it was enough to reveal the hideous nakedness of the unpapered walls, and to declare the invulnerable nature of the strong, common furniture, chairs and forms that had defied time and much service. Upon an ink-spotted surface of green tablecloth a leviathan pewter inkstand reigned in sovereign isolation, with a *chevaux de frise* of reprobate steel pens, transported, as useless material, from the upper story, guarding its muddy contents. The floor had evidently not been swept for a long period of time. It was littered about with torn scraps of paper, bearing addresses, many

of them; bits of blotting paper, whose original hue was problematic; greasy newspapers, which once had enveloped sandwiches or other fatty edibles. Muddy footmarks further disfigured the bare boards. Upon a shelf there was a huge file of certificates, of no value probably, a few sheets of unused ruled paper, and half-a-dozen battered yellow-backed novels. Perhaps they had been contributed for the good of the waiting-room company by some compassionate predecessors, who had waited many days upon their destiny. They were all foreign books, for this registry office was much resorted to by aliens, allured thereto by Madame Judenheim's linguistic facilities and obliging demeanour. Upon the mantel-board, a piece of deal nailed on to the original narrow shelf, an American clock tick-tacked with an exasperating noise. There were two pictures in the room, selected, apparently, as appropriate subjects for the consideration of those who waited here. The Prodigal Son, with the words "Make me as one of thine hired servants," beneath it, faced a highly coloured representation of an Eastern slave market. At these works of art, satire of a coarse kind was frequently levelled by the ladies in waiting.

On this day some half-dozen were gathered together. The empty benches declared a reduction in the usual number. The dull day had defeated the hopes of many, who had gone home in despair of anyone requiring their services. Those who still waited were evidently more anxious to be engaged. They were perplexed, wearied, or resolved in expression, severally. Not much talking went on amongst them. Wistful, yearning glances were cast towards the door each time a bell rang. One of the girls

appeared of a better class than the rest. She bore almost the semblance of gentle birth. She was foreign, and this probably gave her an additional air of refinement. She contrasted favourably with the coarse, vulgar appearance of the others. Maria Garcia had dark eyes and a pure white skin, with an undulating grace of movement which declared her Southern rearing. There was opportunity to notice her easy gait as she paced backwards and forwards the length of the waiting-room, and also that there was something of the caged animal about that light, elastic tread. The monotonous, unresting movement seemed at last to disturb her companions, who muttered some vague complaint. The girl paused, threw up her head, and looked at the dull, weary faces with something which appeared like scorn. She had not understood their words, not being quick to seize a foreign tongue, but the drift of their meaning was intelligible to her. After that quick, comprehensive survey she seated herself at the table and took one of the rusty pens into her hand. It appeared a relief to her to be occupied, or in motion. She began to scribble in Spanish on torn pieces of paper, tearing them up to atoms as soon as she had covered them. From time to time she cast suspicious glances towards the others, as if to mark their attention. If any eye was fixed upon her she flashed a sort of angry defiance back. She had been in the waiting-room many days, but none of them knew anything of her circumstances or qualifications. If they addressed her she answered curtly, in broken English, in the most musical and mournful of voices. When the hands of the noisy little clock pointed to one o'clock, she took from her pocket an apple and a piece of bread, eating

this simple meal with apparent relish. Yet her clothes gave no evidence of destitution or poor circumstances. They were black, of course, but of good quality and well made. Though she was simply clad there was nothing shabby or untidy about her person from head to foot.

Three times the door opened, and sitters were summoned to an audience upstairs. There was a demand for the more common clay, but none for the better sort, it seemed. An angry frown settled down upon Maria's face after each disappointment. Her lustrous eyes would flash fiercely as the door closed and she was left without a call. She would dig her heavy implement deeper into the paper afterwards, writing wildly, and with incredible swiftness. It seemed like a child's effort to rid itself of restlessness. But always most carefully she tore up every scrap into small pieces. Once more the bell jingled noisily. Steps were heard descending to the waiting-room—

"Maria Garcia is to walk upstairs," said a sepulchral voice. The page boy, who officiated as usher, had a remarkable talent for mimicry, which he frequently exercised below stairs, to the alarm of the waiting-room. However, on this occasion Maria was not deceived by his ventriloquial faculty, though the voice appeared to come down the chimney. With an impetuous gesture she flung the pen in her hand, with a true aim, at the little clock, smashing the glass face to atoms.

"*Dios eterno!* at last my turn it comes. Cease your noise of purgatory for this day, you register of my heart beats."

The assembled women, gathered in a group near the fire, started up at this fierce onslaught. Fragments of

glass flew shivering about the room. Maria smiled like a mischievous child at their dismay, revealing her short, white teeth.

"Ah, so now, you girls, you fear me though I have ever been a silent one, who holds my tongue. *Ahi! Ahi!* the fire is not always out when you see no flame. *Dios de mi alma!* I have no meaning to hurt you poor things, you souls with no courage but to wait for fate. To injure cowards who are innocent is not my way. Good-bye to you all. I am assured that a place is mine at last."

She glided out of the room with her graceful Spanish tread. They could hear her swift, light steps echoing over the oilcloth in the lobby as she passed onwards. Her speed only diminished as she approached the scene of trial. Maria Garcia paused at the door, and in a liquid, gushing voice said, knocking, "*Se puede pasar*"—may I come in? She did not appear to be overcome by the important majesty of the presiding divinity, and her special attendant. Madame Judenheim, sat at a desk behind a long table covered with directories, railway guides, bill files, blotting pads, and inkstands. Her clerk, a spectacled young woman, with short cropped hair sticking up on end, was arrayed in a dusty black velveteen gown, covered with much jet of a pendant nature. She wore a superfluity of tinsel bangles, which jingled incessantly as she scribbled away, neither pausing nor looking up when appealed to by her superior.

"You are Spanish, Maria Garcia, speaking English fairly well, seeking a situation in London? The salary is not a very material matter to you. Miss Isaacs, is that how you have entered this young person?" Miss Isaacs

transferred her pen to her mouth, and fluttered back a few pages to letter G, nodding an assent. Maria shook her head in an impatient way, as though the forms were wearisome to her.

"Madame is quite correct," she said, shortly.

"You have resided for nearly a year with an English lady at Gibraltar. You are qualified to dress hair and look after a lady's wardrobe, willing also to make yourself useful with fancy work. Unfortunately, you have never learnt dressmaking."

Madame Judenheim had bent over her secretary, and was reading aloud from the pages of her reference book. Looking up suddenly, she caught an angry flash of Maria's eyes.

"It strikes me your temper is not all that is desirable," she said, emphatically, as she resigned the book to her subordinate.

"No, no; I have a temper like an angel when I am not vexed. But I have told these things many times. *Bueno paciencia.*"

Apparently Madame Judenheim was accustomed to deal with foreigners.

"Well, that is your own look-out. If I get you the place you pay me; but if you can't keep it, I am not responsible for your temper."

"I will have no spirit to be angry when I am placed. I can be gentle as a holy dove if people are kind to me."

The sweet vibrations in the girl's voice were unheeded.

"You have been more than a month waiting for a place, as you have frequently reminded me. It is not my

fault that there is no demand for Spanish servants. I am told they are lazy, cunning, and not trustworthy."

Maria made a gesture of scorn, crying, "*Ahi, ahi.*"

Madame Judenheim waved her fat hand.

"French and Italian maids are always in request, but I have only had one inquiry for a Spaniard since your name has been on my books. It came this morning. The young lady who has applied to me requires an intelligent and companionable maid to walk out with her and keep her things tidy. No dressmaking is done at home, but a hairdressing capacity is necessary. The young lady has a fixed fashion of her own, which she herself will teach. She mentions a French, Italian, or Spanish waiting-woman as all alike to her. This is, as regards wages, a situation which may be called a superior one; but I fear that the young lady is difficult to please. You will certainly not be privileged to show your temper if you enter Lady Mallison's service. I will give you her address, and you may call upon her to-morrow."

The girl was listening, with her foreign ears strained, to catch every syllable of Madame Judenheim's guttural English.

"She lives in London?" she interrupted, with brief emphasis and slight suspicion.

"Yes, most of the year. The young lady you are to attend on is an only daughter, and, I understand, much indulged. If you are lucky enough to please her for more than a week, it will be a profitable place to you. Last year she had two maids from me in three weeks. Her clothes are handsome, and I have heard she is generous where she takes a fancy. Here is the address,

and you must be there before two o'clock. If this does not suit you it will not be easy to find you another situation."

Maria nodded her head.

"I am not afraid—it will suit. Read to me the writing before I take it. Your ugly English tongue does not speak at all like it writes," she said, with angry complaint. "I will say after you."

Madame Judenheim took up the scrap. "It is Miss Mallison, 120, Portland Place, that you are to call on between eleven and two to-morrow or any day this week. It is too late to-day."

She glanced at the clock and nodded her head in token of dismissal, which hint Maria was prompt to take.

When on the next day the girl found her way to the Portland Place house between the hours named, Anne was of course at home. Maria recalled how she had passed this same house a week previously. The pictures and the bronzes and the soft piled carpets within the hall, she had seen before, through the open doors, and now, when she was nearer to them, they seemed to have a shadow of familiarity which encouraged her.

Miss Mallison was reading in the library. She could and did read steadily, though she had no sanctum of her own.

"Why should I set myself apart? I have no objectionable pursuits. I don't distract anyone with scales? I have no literary pursuits, or correspondence, or easels and paint-pots to hedge me away from other people! You know I don't vex the souls of my aunts and cousins with

my attainments. Hobbies and vocations have never called upon me. Why need I sit in seclusion? Depend upon it, the light of common day is good enough for my employments, mamma."

This was Anne's way of talking, which Lady Mallison disapproved of. Her mother had suggested that the former schoolroom should be placed in the hands of decorators and upholsterers, and the globes and school books be banished. All young ladies of position had a boudoir; why not Anne?

But the girl mocked at the notion, and the deserted school-room remained in its former condition of nakedness. No easy chairs, no pretty photographs or nick-nacks, ever came to alter its appearance. Anne sent out a sofa which was cushioned, gave away a tablecloth and ornamental inkstand, seemingly of a mind further to abolish any approach to comfort. The young lady of the house might occasionally be found, not visibly occupied, seated in this bare apartment. An officious housemaid once lighted a fire here unrequested. Anne's wrath was visited upon her subsequently, to her tearful dismay. What did Miss Mallison do here when, in some hours when she would not be missed, she stole away to this upper chamber? She had shelved sonatas and exercises with the departure of her last governess, so she did not come here to practise, certainly. Also, Anne was ignorant of any School of Art embroidery. Neither soft tapestry nor harmonious crewels occupied her in these moments of seclusion. The cottage piano was suffered to become tuneless, and the well-bound lesson books to gather dust behind their glass doors. Lady Mallison had always insisted that her daughter's educa-

tional works should be ornamental. Bookbinders had combined to make school literature outwardly attractive in the best purple and gold attainable.

Anne herself scarcely knew how to explain the attraction which the one bare, cold room in the house had for her. Her moods here were penitential and ascetic. It was the room where she had felt and thought, perhaps suffered, in her child life. The shabby carpet, faded hangings, and general desolation ministered to austere yearnings. Here she could imagine what it might be to be friendless or poor. She was sick of indulgence, she thought. In this room she was not stifled by padding, perfume, and plenty. Here she could picture how life looked to the majority, without rose-coloured curtains to hide grey skies. Here her sympathies were nourished, here she imagined, dreamt, and forgot for awhile that life had allotted to her no active duties, no duties at all. Standing and waiting was a service Anne could never understand. Knowing herself a prisoner beneath a hundred cobweb threads, she sickened at inaction. Yet custom, station, wealth, were chains she could not, or dared not, break. No irregular benevolence was suffered her. Organised charity, systematic distributions, regular contributions, were the laws of the Mallison family. Though Anne's name figured in a dozen subscription lists, she took no interest in the prosperous charities to which she gave so largely at her mother's instigation. Periodical visits to "The Orphan Washerwomen's Home," to "The Refuge for Indigent Shopkeepers," occasions on which Lady Mallison's phylacteries were quite remarkable in their width, did not affect or move Anne's apathy. Rows of well starched and ironed little girls, smiling and

curtseying, puffy apoplectic grocers, and limp linendrapers were not objects for extensive sympathy.

Anne thought she would like to go out of the way to do good, and not to have her name trumpeted to the world, or her treasure laid up for her in heaven at no cost to herself. What merit was there in aught that she did? Every line of self-sacrifice was cut off from her. Thus secretly, with an acute and morbid consciousness of a valueless life, Anne mourned over her position.

CHAPTER VII.

When Croker announced to his young mistress, "A foreign young person to see you, Miss Anne,—a lady's-maid, as I think," the interruption was a welcome one. For more than an hour she had been reading Gibbon steadily, and her mind was not in sympathy with dry history to day. She looked up smiling.

"Where have you left her, Croker? If Célestine gets hold of her she will describe the quality of my wardrobe, and detail my objections to her curling-tongs."

Croker had been a confidential friend of Anne's in days of short frocks, and took part with her at an early epoch against the tyranny of maids and governesses.

"She's on the hall chair," he answered, backing. "This way, mam'selle." He raised his voice outside the door, throwing into it, if Maria had only been aware of it, a tone of unusual condescension. Célestine had been particularly repugnant in feature and manner to Croker, who considered himself to have a very discerning eye for feminine beauty.

"Them yaller complexions and that black hair all of a friz, with a mouth as 'ud swallow a leg of mutton, ain't my notion of style, Mrs. Tucker. And her manner it ain't as respectful as it might be to one as has been in the family fifteen years. I knew how it 'ud be with Miss Anne when that Célestine she come into

our house. She ain't one to stand no grand foreign airs and flummery."

Maria Garcia came quickly at the butler's bidding, not abashed beneath his glance, as he looked her up and down critically. The door closing behind her, Maria lifted her eyes to look at the lady that she hoped would engage her, with the nearest approach to anxiety yet seen on her face. She would take the place, whatever it might be, if it was offered to her, for destitution lay before her. But what would the place be like? Would she be required to serve some hard task-mistress for bread and shelter? At a glance Anne saw there was no servility about this young person. She had no appearance of seeking to ingratiate herself by any manners or affectations foreign to her nature. Miss Mallison thought that this candidate would do. She had a respect for independence, even in a waiting-maid. Anne despised herself chiefly for having none. The rules of Lady Mallison's domestic government were well calculated to crush insubordination or peculiar ways of thinking. Célestine had been a true menial in her apparent submission, and as a personal attendant her flippancy had been distasteful to her young mistress. Anne observed that Maria's head was erect, and that she did not smile with any effort to look pleasant, or speak in a way to denote conscious merit. The girls appeared instantly to take each other's measure. Anne's heavy book fell off her knee to the ground, but Maria did not start forward to pick it up. Anne rather liked this omission.

"You have come about the situation of maid," said Miss Mallison at last, rather at a loss how to begin her questions.

"Yes, Miss." The pretty foreign "s's" fell pleasantly on Anne's ear.

"You are not French, certainly, Italian, perhaps?" continued Anne.

The girl shook her head quickly before saying, with a slight accent of misgiving:

"No; I am Spanish, and my mother was of Spain too."

Then a sudden flash from the girl's eyes startled Anne. There was no occasion for any heat.

"Ah, then, I suppose you mean you are not altogether Spanish," answered the young lady, carelessly.

Apparently family matters were not a congenial topic to the foreigner, for her beautifully arched eyebrows contracted as if with a spasm.

"It is enough my name is Spanish," she said, proudly. "I am called Maria Garcia, and in my country we are a family well known to everyone."

It appeared as if Anne had forgotten the qualifications necessary to a maid.

"How old are you?" she said at last, recalling one of her mother's usual queries.

"I am twenty-four on the first day of June next."

The judicious Croker, having departed from the customary routine of things in admitting the candidate for favour to Anne's presence, had, on second thoughts, considered it advisable to go and acquaint her ladyship of the arrival. He had allowed a certain amount of latitude to his beloved young lady, being an approving spectator of the spirit she had manifested in her steady opposition to Célestine's ministrations, a young person well approved by Lady Mallison. For Célestine had earnestly sought

to convert her young mistress from the errors of her own taste to the true faith in Parisian gowns and elaborate *coiffures*. But Croker had qualms lest Miss Anne should admit a totally unqualified person to her service. Anything so contrary to the fitness of things must not be endured.

Lady Mallison entered the library with customary precision of manner, carefully closing the door after her. She carried in her hand a slip of paper, on which she had methodically set down the requisites demanded of her daughter's attendant. Having seated herself in a large morocco arm-chair, and shaken out her draperies into the desired folds, she looked the little black-robed figure up and down. Maria did not shrink at all beneath that cold, critical inspection.

"You come from Madame Judenheim's, I suppose?"

"Yes, madame."

"You bring written testimonials with you?"

"Yes, madame."

Then Lady Mallison read through her string of questions, Maria answering curtly to each one, almost resentfully, it seemed to Anne.

"Twenty-three; that is younger than I like. I do not approve of giddy young girls. Madame Judenheim may not have told you that my rules are very strict. You must understand that no male friends are admitted to see my servants. Of course you are not engaged?"

Anne felt that she drew her own breath sharply, as the victim shrank suddenly. She was evidently sensitive to a harsh manner and cold address. Miss Mallison stooped for her book.

"God of my life, no! I have no one who loves me."

The girl's eyes were cast down, but she spoke with fierce certainty. Anne's glance returned to her face.

Her ladyship looked down her list to note if perchance she had missed an important query.

"You are accustomed to wait on a lady, of course? I hope you are tidy in your habits. My daughter expects her room to be kept in nice order, and you to be in attendance when she requires to walk out. To whom am I to refer for your character? I need something more than this testimonial. Of course, Madame Judenheim told you I should expect a personal character."

Maria for a moment appeared at a loss to understand, then she pressed her hand suddenly to her brow, with an impatient gesture.

"Personal? Does that mean to see the lady I did serve? That will not be in my power to give to madame, unless madame does think to go to Gibraltar. My lady is the wife of a soldier—officer. Madame can but write to her."

She threw these words at Lady Mallison with a sort of fierce anger, almost disdain. This excellent disciplinarian was disturbed at this uncalled-for ebullition. She lifted her double eye-glass, and deliberately surveyed the young person who ventured to address her in such unusual terms. Her own manner, she felt sure, was always calculated to enforce respect.

"You are a foreigner and a stranger to the ways of this country, otherwise I could not permit such a disrespectful manner and address. If you take service in my house I shall certainly expect you to subdue your temper.

You are a Roman Catholic, I suppose? That also is against you; only it seems impossible to get a respectable foreign servant who is not. Pray what induced you to leave your own country and come to England?"

The girl raised two wild eyes for a second's space. Ah! what, indeed, Lady Mallison? Was it not some strange following out of destiny? There is a blind fulfilment of the fate which decrees that moths shall be burnt in the light of their desires.

But the girl accepted the rebuke with more meekness than Anne had anticipated. Evidently, she was able and willing at times to put a strong check on her natural inclinations. Her tone was subdued to a respectful meekness when she answered. In a sad monotone she said:

"*Ahi, ahi! Santisima Virgen de los Dolores! Jesu Cristo de mi alma!* Why did I leave my country? The days of happiness were gone. *Ahi! nunca volverán!* (they will never return). My mother was dead a long while. I did eat the bread of my stepfather at Cadiz. He goes to sea, and leaves me lonely often. I did desire to perfect my way of speaking your tongue more than to make money. Once I had an English friend. It is a long time ago now, but——"

She broke off suddenly, as though betrayed into some unwitting confidence, and looked at Anne uneasily. The young lady, with folded hands and tranquil gaze, did not appear much interested in the matter of her history. Yet Anne was fully resolved to engage her. She was something widely differing from the ordinary class of lady's-maid. There did truly seem to be a good deal of blazing and smouldering about her, but Anne was inexperienced

enough in opposition and hot tempers to think they would be an agreeable change.

"Mamma, don't you think she will suit me? I do. I shall like to learn a smattering of Spanish, and when I am dull she can play the guitar. Of course, she plays the guitar. Don't you?"

Here Maria broke into a quick smile, and nodded emphatically. The smile faded rapidly.

"Why, I shall feel like an operatic lady. Don't I look like a flirting Spanish Countess, mamma? I shall wear a mantilla, and try and confound society with the flutterings of my fan. What will cousin Hepzibah say?"

This light tone of Anne's was most objectionable in the presence of an inferior.

Lady Mallison pursed up her lips in the severest form of displeasure they knew. This unseasonable flippancy of Anne's was not calculated to inspire an inferior with any respect. But Anne knew far better than her ladyship how to keep people in their places. No one ever ventured to presume on her graciousness or condescension. Having tapped her paper imperatively with her glasses in order to fix the attention of the maid, Lady Mallison said:

"Since it is not possible to see the lady you have lived with, I shall be under the necessity of accepting a written character, which I have never done before. If all things prove satisfactory, I am willing to engage you on a month's trial, and you may enter my service in a fortnight's time. It will take more than a week for me to get a reply. Will it not, Anne, my love?"

Maria cast a quick, upward glance of dismay.

"One whole fortnight! That is fourteen days, and long

to wait." She drew in a heavy breath, checking a sigh. Her slender means had well-nigh run out. Anne, with a quick intuition, instantly divined her need.

"Certainly, it is a fortnight. But I could not think of taking you into my house till I have some knowledge of your respectability. I shall communicate through Madame Judenheim when I have Mrs. Dawson's reply. Good morning."

Lady Mallison bowed to signify the audience was over. Anne got up slowly as Maria turned to go.

"You had better leave your address here, your private address, where you sleep, I mean," said Anne, fixing her with her great grey eyes, wide open on this occasion. Anne endeavoured to make herself intelligible by leisurely speech. The other girl's lips ceased to tremble. The tears were arrested. There was something gloriously suggestive of strength and comfort about Anne's hand as it held out pencil and paper. As she touched the hand, lifting an imploring, passionate regard to the owner, the foreign girl said, almost in a whisper:

"Dear lady, you have *gracia en la mano* (power in the hand)."

A slow, soft smile spread over Miss Mallison's face, making it, for a moment, beautiful.

"There, give it me. I will take care of the paper, mamma, and communicate with her if it is necessary to make further inquiries. Good morning, Maria."

Anne's demeanour carried assurance of an engagement. Forgetting her temporary embarrassment at her poor lodgings, the Spanish girl went out comforted, thinking only of the young lady's beautiful smile.

That same evening Maria's difficulties were relieved by the arrival of a post-office order for three pounds. A few lines on a card curtly demanded an acknowledgment to Miss Mallison. After this, it cannot be doubted that Anne was rash and Quixotic.

Late on the same night the young lady entered the library, dressed for a dance. She found her father bent over some writing, with half-a-dozen evening papers tossed on the floor. At her entry he glanced up, laying down his pen with an air of relief as he leant back in his chair to her embrace.

"How very magnificent you look, my daughter! A very Queen of Sheba! Where *do* you get your features from? Methinks they are not of the Boggis type."

The Judge was not too dignified to joke at the expense of his wife's family. Anne felt the bridge of her nose with one hand, and laughed.

"This is better," she said. Then, with a sort of contempt of vanity, she glanced at her own image in a mirror opposite. Afterwards she encircled his neck with beautiful white arms destitute of bracelets, as beautiful arms should be. Thus, with her face close to his, she made him lift his eyes and look at the double reflection in the glass.

"Why, she's the living image of her father, and oh! she's ever so proud of it. Look, sir! I've only to frown, and shut my mouth tight, and lift my hair back, and behold me transformed into a learned judge? Worthy daughter of such a valuable servant of the State! How should I look on the judicial bench, my lord?"

Anne's playful moods were reserved for her father.

"A female justice lived in the golden age, but the wickedness and impiety of men drove her to heaven. Remain, my constellation, *Virgo*, as you are. There is no space for *Astræa* here, in these days. Innocence and equity do not prevail."

Anne drew herself upwards with mock majesty, lifting one hand in a threatening way.

"Oh, you learned old classic! Well, then, take care your Virgo does not put you in her scales when you get to heaven; and remember her sword is two-edged. She will dig up all the sins of your youth to make weight, depend upon it."

The playful words did not answer for a severe frown on the Judge's face. Before looking at Anne he passed his hand over his eyes. Without any brightening, he said:

"Your hand would never be steady, Anne, to weigh those you loved."

The girl flushed in a moment all over her clear, colourless face. Father and daughter never approached sentiment in speech in their most intimate moments. They skimmed the surface of feeling often enough with banter, but never openly manifested or declared the depths. Anne trembled before the opening of any door which might reveal her heart to another. The passion which had betrayed her a few evenings ago was unaccountable, and something she would not think of. With a light laugh, she turned from the subject as it approached a grave termination.

"Never fear, I should call in Nemesis to help me. But, papa, I came here to confess something, and you have put it all out of my head. Oh, I remember now: it was

about my new maid. I've so far departed from the way of mamma's training as to take a real decided fancy. Will magnetic attraction account for it, do you think? I never felt so interested before in any woman submitted to my approval. I think I must have known her in some stage of pre-existence. Mamma says I'm taking a sinful responsibility on myself to engage such an ungoverned nature."

Anne's face was graver now. The Judge gazed with a smile, half cynical, half compassionate, at her.

"What, and has that elegant Célestine abandoned her claims to your wardrobe as well as her efforts to convert you to curling-tongs? And has this future lady-in-waiting promised to renounce the devil and the flesh, lovers and admirers, as well as the reversion of your garments? Pray, what becomes of all this splendour when it is cast off? Such classic draperies would hardly befit Parisian corsets.

He touched the soft, white silk—dead-white, for Anne never wore sheeny stuffs—with a cautious hand, as though afraid of soiling its purity. Anne, laughed in clear tones of enjoyment. Her smiles and laughter were not so frequent towards the outer world.

"Father, you are but a stupid, unobservant man, after all. Remember, I don't think you one bit clever! Don't you know that mamma is always complaining that I wear the same gowns for a year and a day? But now let me tell you about my young woman before mamma comes down. I shall soon have a new accomplishment to show off to you, my lord! I'm going to learn Spanish. Did you ever hear of anyone with a Spanish maid? I never did. When I told cousin Hepzibah this afternoon that I

had engaged one, she assured me that it was a dangerous experiment, and that I would probably be the victim of a stiletto if I didn't dress to please her. Depend upon it, next month I shall be playing the guitar and dancing the *Tarantella*. She is such a pretty, graceful little thing, not like an everyday maid. Mamma has never allowed me to have anyone nice to look at, for fear of the footmen. I do hope Thomas won't make love to her."

Anne, buttoning her long gloves, frowned a little over the task. She did not look at her father as she spoke. For a moment he turned his face away from her view.

"They do not dance the *Tarantella* in Spain, Anne," he said, shortly.

"Oh, I am always wrong! What is it, then? *Bolero*, *Saraband*—anything that is wild and improbable, for me."

But the Judge answered her with a voice of quiet raillery:

"My Stoic daughter, with an enthusiasm for a piece of humanity, is something new and unexpected. I am amazed to hear of a woman who receives your praise and inspires your interest. Miss Mallison, so you have at last fallen from your high estate of indifference. What would John Spencer say? By the way, Anne, do you think Spanish moods will suit you? Greek would have been more becoming. You might have sought out some humble Sappho, and have benefited your generation by publishing meritorious sonnets. Surely thus you might have satisfied those yearnings to do good deeds."

Anne winced. The Judge's tone was biting. Her armour of reserve had fallen off on that memorable

evening; and though she might assume it again, it would never be possible to make a vaunt of her sound condition.

"My dear, the *cluton* and accompaniments would suit you admirably. There, now, child, I will not vex you. You would like to be different from the rest of frivolous womanhood. Oh, unwise desire, my daughter. You had better content yourself with the gods of Mammon."

He smiled at her as she looked down at him, half in anger, half in shame. But, somehow, as she looked, all the anger melted away. Her lips curved and trembled, rebellious to her will.

"Beautiful Antigone, if you must make sacrifice, here is a worn-out Edipus ready to be led by your hand."

The same puzzling, unsearchable look dwelt in his eyes as before. She looked at him a moment with a restless, uneasy gaze. Then her proud head bent down once more, and she threw her soft arms about his neck, whispering, in hurried, trembling accents:

"You puzzle me always, father; but I know you understand, though you pretend to think me only foolish. I cannot live the life that other girls do, and be happy. Surely, when you were young, you thought of something besides being rich and famous—about doing good?"

Anne paused a second, and in the pause the Judge spoke.

"Unprofitable dreams, Anne," he said coldly; "you will grow contented with the ways of pleasantness presently."

She drew away from him a moment, casting down her eyes, while she spoke with slower consideration.

"Perhaps it may be so, for a worldly skin soon seems to grow over people. To be admired and envied, and to

know grander people than themselves, seem to satisfy other girls. I may become contented with my life as it is, but now it is not happiness to me at all. It may be as you say, that I want to be different from the rest, and circumstances will not let me. There, now, good-night, you wise papa. I hear mamma's gown on the stairs. Say good-night to me like you used to. Say God bless my little daughter."

She threw her arms round him once more, hiding her face on his shoulder. There was almost a sob in her voice. This was a strange mood for Anne Mallison.

"Good-night, my daughter," said the Judge, in a quiet way.

"I shall never love anyone as I do you, father, never, never!" said the girl, yet more vehemently. If she had not harboured the thought of loving some other, she might not have deemed it necessary to assert her constant affection.

After this ebullition Anne raised herself, gathering up her mantle and fan, and walking with more than her customary dignity out to the carriage, where her mother awaited her.

CHAPTER VIII.

It chanced that Mr. John Spencer did not meet Harry Mallison till that young man had firmly established himself in the good graces of his London relatives. Though Anne's cousin became a constant frequenter of the Portland Place house, turning up, of course, only at legitimate hours, circumstances did not occur to throw these men in the way of one another. John had ceased to come at all for a space of time before Christmas, and for a week or two after. And these weeks were golden opportunities to Harry, who managed, somehow or other, to get invited to entertainments where Anne and her mother were likely to put in an appearance, Each of these young men remained in ignorance, for some time after Harry's entry on the scene, of the existence of the other. John and Anne had partly patched up a reconciliation. They had met two or three times after the occasion of Anne's outburst, and by her demeanour she had almost begged his pardon for her denunciation. She appeared to deprecate his mockery with more humility than she had ever displayed before. She almost took an attitude of having deserved it. It might be said that her behavour was propitiatory, particularly so, if they chanced to be left alone together. But this was of rare occurrence, Lady Mallison having an uneasy dread concerning this companion of Anne's early youth, never long at rest.

It was a dinner party in Portland Place which brought the two young men together for the first time. To Anne's surprise, John, on this occasion, appeared rather the better man of the two. Harry's personal appearance and manners, quite irreproachable, had guaranteed him a man of mark amongst any fellows, whereas Anne had been accustomed to regard John as a man not of society, or likely at any time to shine there. In the matter of card-leaving and well-fitting raiment, and courtly graces, polish, and compliment, he was a social sinner, according to Lady Mallison. Anne knew that his bows were laughable, his attitudes remarkable. As a boy he had been a lout, and he had grown up into a man with arms and legs too prominent, and gesticulations also too unconsidered. Yet, with all these exterior disadvantages, strange to say, John held his own side by side with Captain Mallison. He was of a heavier build, taller, and of a more commanding presence, it seemed. In some indescribable way he dwarfed her cousin. Harry was beyond dispute a handsome man, but yet the candle of his attractions had never burnt so dimly in Anne's sight as to-night. John was loud and boisterous at times, but there was a clear ring of enthusiasm and enjoyment in his voice which made such ebullitions even pardonable. Anne was quick to feel the difference, and in some unfixed way she felt angry, disappointed, that Harry did not show to advantage on this particular evening. She was not in love with Harry at all, neither did she entertain the remotest idea of marrying him. Yet his respect and deference for her opinion flattered her insensibly. He was, somehow or other, her charge, and she felt herself in a vague way responsible for his good

behaviour. His failure to be foremost on this occasion made her angry. She had expected to see John Spencer set aside. But even her cousin's superior personal attractions and charming ease of manners did not crowd out the popular barrister's personality. Anne had thought John might feel or look insignificant beside a fashionable young man who was not absolutely a fool. Yet, heavily handicapped as he was, or seemed to be, he succeeded in passing the winning post and attracting general attention.

Anne had by this time tacitly accepted the office of friend and guide to her cousin. She dimly entertained the notion of saving him from further temptation, believing in the protecting grace of her own good influence. She had brought herself to feel, not unwillingly, that there was a task allotted to her from which she might not shrink. It had the advantage of being one which might easily be carried on within the circumscribed conditions of her life without attracting outside attention; for Anne greatly feared any notice which might end in ridicule. Thus was her enthusiasm ever kept in check.

A visionary, vain girl, you think! Yet, after all, the notion of redeeming a brother's soul has in it a nobler germ than the self-interested motives which drive many of us post-haste along the road to heaven in order to make our own everlasting habitations secure. Physician, heal thyself, is a line of conduct recommended, but certainly does not embody the purest atheism.

"I do not want to get to the heavenly mansions and find myself friendless there. Let some, who are worse off than me, have part and lot in a better life. I will labour to set him in the right way, even if I turn aside and wait to do

it." Probably, some such thoughts as these struck Anne in one of her silent watches in the deserted school-room. At her feet there had fallen one who was weak, if not absolutely a sinner. He had sought her pity, and had set her up in the place of good. Soon she had begun to lecture him, to give him counsel, and finally to find her prodigal interesting. Harry contrived to show his amiability and warm-hearted feelings favourably, and his cousin ceased to condemn a weak will and a nature made of impulses which were so affectionate.

However, to-night Anne's clear judgment was not blinded. She was compelled to confess that the man who needed no repentance forced notice and respect amongst his fellows, while her sinner did not even leave her the satisfaction of pitying him.

Mr. Spencer had recently won a celebrated case, and as many of his profession were present at the dinner party, his appearance was the signal for a volley of congratulation. In a few seconds the attention of the whole room was fixed upon him. A buzz of homage surrounded him. Instinctively, Captain Mallison scented a rival in this man, whom Anne had never alluded to, and yet who seemed on familiar terms with the family. The Judge was almost jocular towards him, and Anne gave him a little friendly nod and her left hand, which spoke significantly of long acquaintance and a discarded formality. From the depths of his easy-chair—Harry always lighted on the best padded, most springy seat in the room—this young man criticised the aspect and demeanour of the late comer. John was late, as a matter of course. His clothes were vilely made, also of course. He wore a white

tie, not of the prescribed width, and his dress boots were out of shape, and destitute of gloss. Yet his good-humoured banter, his rollicking laugh, his wit, and keen glances seemed to mark him out. The fellow was a cad, of course, decided Harry. He dressed like a seedy waiter, and talked other men down. A barrister, of course; they were all alike, bumptious pushing, brutes, with none of the instincts of good breeding. After awhile the softly-cushioned easy chair did not seem so comfortable.

"I, too, congratulate you, John, if my good wishes are worth having," said Anne under her breath, as the man whom Captain Mallison vilified crossed the room and nearly fell across Miss Mallison's feet.

Why the deuce did Anne call that ugly lout John? But Harry's rising feelings of annoyance were soon dispersed. The influence of the hour was upon him, and he abandoned himself to the task of entertaining a companion not altogether disagreeable to him.

The lady allotted to this captivating young soldier to convey down to dinner, decided in her own mind that she had drawn the prize of the evening. I believe it is a well-known fact that before dinner young ladies do look about drawing-room corners anxiously, or start nervously at the announcement of a new comer, with reference to their probable partners. So much business may be done in two hours and a half of companionship at a dinner table, and the fates are too often cruel. The young lady in point was youthful enough to be hopeful. Dinner parties and their disappointments were yet a novelty to her. Belonging, herself, to the department of law, her worthy papa being a Puisne Judge, she was familiar with the

customary types of that profession. Barristers floated her round ball-rooms, steered her conversation between the courses of dinners, and, in fact, formed the primary element of her acquaintances. She was minded to row herself into another sea. For this maiden was endowed by nature with a fund of chatter and coquetry which she seldom had an opportunity of making capital of. The unbounded loquacity and self-sufficient patronage of her papa's friends (for, of course, fledgling barristers, briefless, and yet humble were never welcomed to the paternal feasts of state) admitted no rivalry in the matter of speech, or tricks of maidenly perversity.

This handsome partner, introduced to her as Captain Mallison, appeared to appreciate the artillery of her charms, as well as her lively remarks, in the ante-prandial moments. He promptly shook off the abstracted air which she had at first noticed about him, and lent a sympathetic ear and amused smile to her efforts to please. The young lady noted with approval his appearance generally, his soldierly bearing, his silky moustache, almost buttonless waistcoast, the extreme narrow points of his shoes, and the cobweb fineness of his cambric handkerchief. Her own faction of law, in its successful days, sinned grievously in such matters of detail.

It so happened this evening that Anne was seated at the dinner table next to John Spencer. She thought that she detected a lurking smile in her neighbour's eyes when he turned and found her at his side. Did he think she was there of her own intention? Should she admit that she read his thoughts?

"It is not my fault I am here," she said with a cold

smile, after a struggle not to speak. "I know I am never an amusing neighbour."

She challenged an answer with a full glance.

"I am honoured by your proximity," he said, with raillery in his voice. "My dear Miss Anne, suppose we call it a lucky catastrophe."

He always called her Miss Anne in public, and she hated it. There was a sort of domestic familiarity about it which seemed to advertise his indifference. If it had been merely Anne, she would not have resented it; but not being Anne, it certainly ought to be Miss Mallison. Yet so fearful was she of John's ridicule that she never opened her lips to object.

"A lucky catastrophe for you or for me, do you mean? It is you who are generally considered a fortunate man," she said, not looking up, but with a voice full of emphasis.

He looked at her sharply for an instant before turning round to address his elderly neighbour on the other side. For a long time Anne had noticed that John was becoming unresponsive. He seemed to ignore her challenges, and to take less heed of her moods than of yore. It was more difficult to provoke him to wrath. He either yielded gently or was silent, as though she were an antagonist beneath notice. After a few efforts to retain their old attitude, Anne had many months ago given up the struggle. She was too proud to force herself upon his notice. Nothing less than a direct reproach drew his attention towards her. It had been so on the occasion of her outburst. Almost she believed that he despised women, esteeming them lightly, as frivolous and shallow. Yet there was his devotion to his own family to be remembered. He did

not consider those foolish virgins, his sisters, unworthy of interest.

Anne had looked forward to the meeting between her cousin and Mr. Spencer with a curious sensation. She was not sure whether she wished John to appreciate her cousin. But John, she knew, was penetrating, and his judgment to be relied on. Somehow, Anne yearned to be reassured concerning Harry's genuineness. His frank manners had won her to believe in him, and to compassionate him; but in an indescribable way something of the impression of a spontaneous nature had worn off since the first. It was as if his frankness was a trick that hid a threadbare material. He blinded her with false impressions, perhaps. It might be that there was no good fibre in him, though the nap appeared smooth and close.

But anxious as Anne was that John should speak to her of her cousin, his light-hearted cheeriness, his pleasant laughter and acceptance of pompous congratulations, threw her back into herself. He had no need of her to entertain him; her sympathy, her interest, her smiles, were indifferent to him. Life was to him full of variety and business. He was in earnest, with no time to devote to drones. Once a child whom he had affected to love tenderly, she was now a woman with whose concerns and way of living he had nothing to do. To-night she had fully intended to be gracious and submissive towards him. She had almost made up her mind to invite once more the objectionable Mabel and Dolly, his sisters, to spend a fortnight with her. She sighed over the heroic sacrifice. It was a whole month since she had seen John, and yet he had no words for her beyond those the merest courtesy demanded.

Dinner went on, and he laughed and chatted gaily with an elderly dame who paid much respect to the *menu* and none to her digestion, quite regardless that his host's daughter, beautiful, and willing to make herself pleasant, was sitting next to him. Anne's left-hand neighbour, who had escorted her down to dinner, was cousin Hepzibah's husband, Alderman Turnover. He left his young relation very much to herself, except in the short intervals between the courses. Anne was consequently fully at liberty to contemplate Captain Mallison opposite her. His manœuvres were not calculated to satisfy her. This young man had soon made certain that John Spencer was wholly indifferent to his fair neighbour, so he promptly recovered spirits and zest for a good dinner. The rapid reaction told agreeably on his neighbour's esteem for her partner.

After all, reflected Harry, what could there be to fear from a rival with a cheery-whiskered face and an incipient baldness on his crown? Those keen-eyed men who laughed loudly and dressed badly were never experienced lady-killers. And Harry gauged his own attractions in this line as superexcellent. Certainly this fresh-coloured barrister with the objectionable tie appeared fancy-free, whoever he might be, and Anne was certainly not a woman to throw her affections at any man's head.

Having decided matters to his comfort, Harry began to make himself agreeable to his young lady. Far too agreeable, thought Anne, as she watched him, and watched the reciprocating glances of Miss Rose Carden; yet she was not jealous. It was rather a feeling of resentment against a facile nature easily moved to enjoyment. Harry

was full aware that his pleasantries cut two ways. First, Anne was looking on, and it was more than probable that she might be piqued. You see, Harry judged his cousin according to the only standard of womanhood with which he was acquainted. Secondly, his neighbour was a sprightly little brunette, ready to bandy compliments and meaningless sentiment, as arrant a little flirt as ever stepped. And Captain Mallison never missed an opportunity of being pleased or amused.

Anne looked on coldly, without any concealment of her condemnation.

After all, he was just as full of levity and inconstant purpose as other young butterflies. He was but another of the society puppets, who were satisfied to eat, drink, or be merry at anybody's or everybody's cost. Yet I do declare Anne was not jealous. She neither feared nor suspected artifice, and Harry's play was made in vain. There came a lull in the flow of John Spencer's talk, when his companion became absorbed in *entrées*. He turned unexpectedly, and caught Anne's glance on Harry's head, bent over his lively partner's arm as she showed him many bangles, her trophies of conquest. It seemed that Anne's neighbour partly read her thoughts.

"*Ignis fatuus*," he said, looking straight into her eyes. "You are interested in that strange young man, Miss Anne."

"He is no stranger, he is my cousin," she said, with cold indifference.

"Your cousin, indeed!" said John, once more casting a searching glance opposite. "A star of another firmament, surely. How comes he to be drawn out of the orbit of frivolity? Your satellite, Anne, eh?"

It seemed to her that he spoke with careless unconcern. But he waited for an answer. She raised her eyes slowly to the top of John's head. It could hardly be said she was not looking at him.

"My powers of attraction are not so great. But he certainly is my friend, as well as my cousin, Mr. Spencer."

An uncompromising stare from John, which Anne felt rather than saw. Her eyelids fluttered.

"Ah, indeed! A friend by adoption on your part, or particular grace on his own?"

Then Anne lowered her eyes.

"You must know him, and try to like him. I think you will." She was not aware that there was an accent of pleading in her voice now.

Did she really think John would like him? John, who would trace no family resemblances, nor be tolerant of any weaknesses that went with them. He, whose unfailing acumen never hesitated nor proved itself deficient, would certainly penetrate any artificial assumption of manner or address.

"Anything to oblige you, Miss Anne. But if I take his measure according to a standard an inch or two short of your ideality, you must promise not to quarrel with me. If I diminish his stature I shall be lenient to him."

Anne said, with cold denial, "You know I have no ideality. It is one of my misfortunes to imagine nothing beyond my experience."

An odd smile spread over the man's face.

Anne continued, with more energy, "You know, John, that I walk round in a treadmill track. I am weary of my

certainties. No new ideas, no fresh hopes of people ever visit me."

The smile vanished from Mr. Spencer's face. He only answered, "Really," and turned himself round to his right-hand companion. There was no further opportunity given to Anne, and Alderman Turnover found her, for once, a most agreeable neighbour. She vouchsafed to be interested in his domestic matters, and expressed her intention of spending the next Sunday at Highgate.

"I want to see Mary Ann's paintings," she remarked, without any of the condescending patronage which flavoured her mother's intercourse with her relatives. Mary Ann Turnover was the least Dutch-doll-like of the cousins, and by her family was considered a very remarkable genius. She had a weak talent for imitative art, and spent much of her time at the National Gallery. The result was, a succession of feeble copies of masterpieces, bestowed usually as wedding presents upon her friends. Anne was aware that the Alderman gloried greatly in the accomplishments of his flock. Many a time, in sarcastic mood, she had scoffed at the devotion of her cousins to the fine arts. Their gaudy productions of needle and brush, their showy musical performances, were subjects always at hand to ridicule. But to-night she was more kindly disposed than usual. Her mood was not pitiless, though she was suffering—perhaps because she was suffering. Anne thought, if she went to Highgate on Sunday, she would criticise kindly, and not scornfully. At any rate, Mary Turnover had a devotion, and did produce work, and in so much she was better than herself. A fine contempt of herself did not visit Anne for the first time. Surely it

would be better to be the performer of feeble things than an absolute drone. But no brooding care appeared to sit on Miss Mallison's brow during the evening. Her efforts in the drawing-room to relieve Lady Mallison of the hard work of conversation astonished cousin Hepzibah, who, at the moment of departure, whispered her cousinly flatteries.

"How handsome Anne looked to-night, dear Clara, and how pleasant in her manner! Captain Mallison, is that the young man's name? He is very attentive. Ah, yes, I suppose so. Very desirable, no doubt." And the Alderman was roused from his stertorous slumbers on the way to Highgate, to listen to his spouse's confidences.

"Trying to keep the money in the family, is she, Hep.? Well, I'm sure I don't grudge her a husband for her daughter. A fine-looking young chap, that Captain, and a deuced good hand at passing the bottle."

When all the guests had said good-night, Anne sat awhile in the back drawing-room with her eyes on the French clock. There was one who had not taken his departure, and Anne could hear the hum of his voice through the curtained archway. He was talking to her ladyship. By-and-by a chair was pushed back, and Mr. Spencer appeared in the opening. He came near to her. Without unclosing her lips, she pointed with her fan to a chair close beside her own. He shook his head in a negative way.

"I want to speak to you," she said. Perhaps he saw what an effort it was to her to say so much. "Will you not sit down?" Once more he shook his head and essayed a light laugh.

"Tempt me not, fair siren, to linger in your charming presence. Your father sits below in judicial solemnity to smoke the pipe of peace with me before I go."

Anne's fan now hid all her face except her eyes. If she felt that he had rebuffed her, her voice did not betray any anger or annoyance.

"It were indeed a mighty siren that could lure Mr. Spencer from the attractions of law. What have you and my father been disputing about?"

John, who was leaning on the back of a light chair, tilted it backwards and forwards.

"Politics, of course—the short-sighted vision of our rulers. In idea we are each on a pinnacle of Mount Pisgah. Unfortunately, we don't look at the promised land through the same telescope.

"Well, good-night, Miss Anne. What! no hand to spare for an old friend? You have, I fancy, a singular antipathy to shaking hands—with me." For a moment he paused over her, while Anne closed and unclosed her fan over her lips, with eyes cast down.

"I came to tell you that I made friends with your cousin across the walnuts. He is genial; he is handsome; he is smart, His ingenuous nature is open to view, but——"

Anne stood up quickly.

"But me no buts to-night, Mr. Spencer. I am desperately tired of making myself agreeable; too tired to take in the degrees of your approval, or the measure of my cousin's failings. Come on Sunday, and I will listen with all deference to firstlies, secondlies, thirdlies, buts, and notwithstandings. Good-night."

After all, she did put out her hand, and in doing so dropped her fan. John, when he had released the strong, white member from his firm clasp, allowed her to pick up the tortoiseshell toy for herself. He saw, when it was too late, what he had omitted to do. He smiled an apology.

"I beg your pardon."

"It is not necessary. I never expect Mr. John Spencer to trouble himself with ordinary courtesies. I at least am tolerant of his errors of politeness."

CHAPTER IX.

JOHN SPENCER'S family was by no means made up of interesting or exemplary members. His mother, a weak, vain matron, centred her ambition on ranking with county society; and his sisters, spinsters of a ripe age, made manifest their desire to accomplish matrimony after a manner decidedly objectionable. They lived in the vicinity of Exeter, and were famed far and wide for their follies and brilliant toilettes. Anne recalled, always with a shudder, a visit of the two Misses Spencer to Portland Place a year or two ago. The toils and struggles she had gone through on their behalf did not endear them to her recollection. That sort of martyrdom was not one of any merit in Anne's sight. During three weeks of the season she had laboured valiantly, morning, noon, and night, not to her own edification, to gratify those insatiable lovers of flirtation and gaiety. She improved neither mentally nor morally beneath this ordeal, and came out of the fray with a yet larger contempt for the vanities of womankind. The Misses Spencer consulted Anne regarding their clothes with mock deference, without abating a jot or tittle of what they called "style." They smiled serenely, with superior wisdom, when she condemned in unmeasured terms some exaggerated efforts of fashion which rendered them the target of remark wherever they went. "Woman is nothing if not singular," was part of their creed, and it

is positively true of plain womanhood. These foolish virgins contrived to have young men following them wherever they went. Bouquets came daily, accompanied by little notes, over which they giggled with genuine enjoyment. They ogled, they simpered, they powdered their faces, they padded their figures; finally, they completed the tale of sins by calling new male acquaintances by their Christian names in public places.

How in the world did John Spencer come to have such a pair of sisters? They did everything that Anne's soul abhorred, and she condemned them without pity, as innately vulgar. Yet John tolerated them. He even ministered to their vanities by handsome presents, and an allowance of pin-money which to Miss Mallison seemed very large. This they frittered away on trumpery ornaments which did not add to their charms.

It was not long after they left before Anne became aware that she had betrayed her distaste for these companions. This young lady had flattered herself that no one could have told how she loathed their practices. But John had found her out, and rebuked her want of charity in a conversation quite irrelevant to his sisters.

Anne was expressing to him a contemptuous dislike for the tone of a recent novel then under discussion between them. Mr. Spencer took the part of the writer with a good deal of warmth. He concluded by saying:

"My dear young lady" (Anne hated to be called a young lady as much as she hated to be called Miss Anne), "toleration is not one of your failings, I am sure, in *any* direction."

"I thought it was considered a virtue. What do you mean?" she said, coldly.

"I mean that you are intolerant, and that your intolerance seems a virtue to you. You are proud that you don't 'suffer fools gladly,' and that you don't mind damaging your popularity to shake them off."

Considering Anne's labour on the Misses Spencer's behalf, this was scarcely fair. In loud, emphatic tones, John continued—

"You consider that iniquitous, tolerant people like me, for instance, lend their support to falsehood, vanity, and other vicious tendencies of human nature. You think that I must disbelieve in goodness to be such a tolerant devil. Certainly, having seen much of the evil side of life, I am not one to expect my neighbour to be better than I am myself. I know what temptation means, which probably you do not. The consequence is that I can't leave a large margin for foolish people's virtues. But at the same time I don't hit them when they have fallen down below my estimate, nor do my utmost to prevent them getting up again. Yes, certainly, I am tolerant of weakness, contemptible vanities, and foolishness, as you call it."

Anne bent her head forward across the little intervening table. She rested both elbows upon it, touching the tips of the fingers of both hands. She looked steadily at the man confronting her.

"Yes, I know: tolerant of all weakness but mine! And do you think I am not well aware you hold me as a Pharisee, thanking God that I am not constituted as other girls are! It is no merit in me, is it,

that I have no temptation or need to look out for a husband?"

Mr. John Spencer smiled with a singular expression, which was not derision. With a mock gesture of surprise, he answered quickly:

"Well, well, young lady, what plain language is this? My dear Miss Anne, it would be more becoming, as Lady Mallison says, to employ some circumlocution on occasions. Take a lesson from us. We men of argument, you must admit, clothe our most significant meanings prettily, or diplomatically."

But this banter vexed Anne. She looked at him with reproof. It seemed to her he avoided a direct glance.

"You want me to talk sense?" he said, standing up and pacing backwards and forwards. "Look here, Anne! Just now I called toleration a failing. So it may become in some people. It will never sit as a fault on you. You will never be able to treat the sins and sorrows of this world lightly. You admire immensely that enthusiasm of virtue which does not suffer men or women to close their eyes to troublesome things. You think a zeal which forces them to interpose their will or authority to small wrongs is noble. You, too, would fain *not* bow down to popular fetishes, and would, if you had the moral courage, refuse to conform to practices and social ordinances which you despise. I admit that there are directions in which intolerance is a beautiful thing; but to rebel against the petty discords of your life, to set yourself in opposition of contempt to trivial faults, is vain, and not at all beautiful. It savours of a want of charity and narrow-minded conceit. You will never reform frivolous women by your scorn.

And, my dear young lady, you have given yourself so much unnecessary trouble." John laughed in a short, mirthless way. "They that break butterflies upon the wheel of contempt have no deep understanding of the nature of frailty."

Anne threw herself back in her chair, and the man looked at her for a moment. His voice changed when he went on: "Do you remember when you were a little girl, Anne, some lines I taught you, 'Little things on little wings lift little souls to heaven'? There are some poor feather-headed souls we both know of drifting aimlessly and foolishly through life. You might have influenced them to some purpose if you had not swamped their feeble little yearnings for good utterly by the magnitude of your derision. The last state of the woman is worse than the first."

Mr. Spencer paused here, as Anne, stretching out one hand, essayed to interrupt him. He stopped in front of her, but she did not look up at him, and her words seemed slow in coming.

"I was hard, I know. I have been wrong in my way of judging about things. I have no sympathy. But you never seem to think I try to do right. It is only that I have not been brought up to see straight—or to see at all," she said at last.

Mr. Spencer stretched out his hand with muttered words. Anne did not hear his "Poor child," and drew away from his hand. Then he began to pace the room once more.

"I do not say they are not vain and foolish girls, although they are my sisters; I do not defend their conduct in any way. But you were cold and contemptuous to them, and

declared the better part you had chosen by your severe disapproval. Anne, you shall not say you have never been taught to see. Who can see till they open their eyes voluntarily? And the most understanding eyes are those which look about them the most, that search for capabilities of good. You go from the Dan to Beersheba of your circle, and say that all is barren in social and fashionable life. You take heroic high flights, and think to learn wisdom and goodness in some other world. Cease to soar, learn to stoop. There, young lady, I am going now. Where the deuce is my hat? I have given you a long lecture on toleration. Will you say good-bye, and forgive me as you used to when you were a child, and I laughed at your false calculations?"

She stood up quickly. She did not ask him to stay. Nay, she was glad for him to go. He had seen her emotion. He had placed her in the wrong. She wanted to be alone and think over it all, and to wonder wherein she had betrayed her dislike of her companions.

"Oh, but I have gone on making false calculations always, it seems. If I were a child again, perhaps I might learn better, or perhaps unlearn many things. John, I know all you mean, though you have not said it." She paused a moment. It was seldom she relapsed into the old habit of calling him by his name, but it escaped her unawares now. She went on with difficulty, the words dropping from her lips as though an apology were not easily fashioned. "I did thing unkindly of Dolly and Mabel when they were here. I said things about their friends that were hard and unjust. It is quite true I despised your sisters for caring only for amusement and

the attentions of men. I do not know how you found it out, for I did not want you to know. Indeed, I will try not to be so exacting, and hard—and blind——"

She gave him her hand in a way that was almost child-like. He did not smile at all as he turned away from her quickly and ran down the staircase. His steps did not resound on that pile-carpeted floor, and he let himself out of the front door, allowing it to bang vehemently behind him. These solemn portals were wont to close and unclose only to the soft touch of butler and footmen. Mr. Croker, looking out of the pantry window beneath, shuddered with awe.

"There now, Tummas, if he ain't been and let hisself out as cool as if he were master. What next, I wonder? Where's the boy? Why weren't he waiting in the hall?"

Summary justice was administered to the defective menial, who had been off guard at the critical moment.

As Mr. Spencer went down the street at a rapid pace, being late for an appointment, he repeated softly to himself:

> "I fall into short-sighted pity for those men
> Who, living in some perfect future time,
> Shall not know half the dear imperfect things
> That move my smiles and tears."

Now, John knew very little of poetry or the language of sentiment. Neither did he habitually reflect in epigrammatic language or rhythmic periods, as clever men are not unfrequently credited with doing by venerating understandings. He had picked up the lines in some discursive reading, having no notion of their author. Yet, somehow, they had fitted themselves to a certain image

whose great imperfections were unaccountably dear to him. This barrister was not moved to smiles or tears at that particular moment, only somewhat graver than usual.

This interview had taken place the previous summer, some six months before Anne was introduced to you. To all appearance the two concerned in it promptly forgot the conversation. Anne's repentance certainly did not outlast that particular season. She resumed her old manners, her indifference to daily concerns, her silent acquiescence to her mother's demands, her uncheerful conformity to social obligations, her cold glances, her disdainful smiles. Her bitter condemnations, her scoffings, were no less. Mr. Spencer, too, seemed to have obliterated all recollection of a friendly interview, when the established reserve had broken down, and Anne had asked to be forgiven with a dangerously seductive humility. By degrees, a thicker veil than before seemed to gather between the pair. Each appeared on the defensive against sentiment or suspicion of feeling. John happened to stay at the same house in the Highlands as the Mallisons during the autumn, and Anne was confident he avoided her. If, by any oversight on Lady Mallison's part, her daughter was left a few moments unguarded, Mr. Spencer invariably made excuses to escape from the room. Anne keenly resented this. She took a new departure in the ways of perversity. If he was present, her bitter words, like arrows, went abroad; biting, poisoned weapons which left nothing good untouched. Nothing was worthy of respect. She upheld opinions she despised, maintained principles her heart condemned, and lowered herself as far as it was possible to do in her own judgment. The very sight of his smiling face, serene

under every provocation, goaded the girl to cruelty towards others, and to the greatest of cruelty to herself. And he took it all, apparently, as a matter of course; as only what could be expected of her, paying her back in her own coin. He joined with her in her mockery and gibes, in her contempt of life, in imputing evil motives to all actions; giving her apparently no credit for feelings she denied, in fact, supporting her own cynical philosophic mind. This calm acceptance of the negative morality she proclaimed almost maddened her at times. She yearned to cry out that she was playing a part. But John gave no hint that he guessed her true mind. To argue with her, to take an opposite side, would have satisfied her. She wanted him to condemn her or to doubt her. But he did neither, and when he caught her in her own net of cynicism, she felt that he believed her cold-hearted.

It had only been now and again of late years that conversations such as recorded in the last chapter gave her faint intimations of his real mind. But these were so rare, and Mr. Spencer seemed a man who in daily practical life lived so far apart from any lofty imaginings or high ideals, that she was of opinion that such expressions were not genuine convictions or living principles that actuated his life. But still, as long as the doubt remained, that he did not conceive of life and its duties after the careless, indifferent fashion of those who surrounded her, her heart listened for an inspiration, and her mind bent itself towards him. It was after a long period of cold intercourse that Anne had suddenly revealed her heart. The agitation on the occasion of her father's return from circuit had been disproportionate to the cause. Her long

pent-up wrath and soreness, and sense of her own worthlessness, had burst out in John's presence, suddenly passing the limits of her proud control. She was more humble and shame-faced afterwards, and from that evening her demeanour towards him altered. At the few meetings which had subsequently taken place, her speech and manner were soft and conciliatory. Then he had gone out of town for Christmas, remaining away till the day of the dinner party. And this was how no opportunity had occurred for him to meet Captain Mallison.

CHAPTER X.

It was now the second week in January, and Harry Mallison had returned to Dublin some days since. It was a judiciously-timed absence. Anne was surprised to find how much she missed her cousin, and how barren of interest the conversation of other young men seemed to be. Their inane platitudes had none of the boyish freshness and sparkle which so refreshed her in Harry's speech. Society men were a bore to her, and at this time found her cold stare and silent ways more formidable than ever. The truth was, Harry had ministered to his cousin's self-love, as well as to her desire to do good. Perhaps the self-love and that desire could hardly be separated. Her contentment with herself abated greatly when he was no longer present to appeal to her humbly, to look at her gratefully. His very belief in her enduring goodness bound her over to a new sort of virtue. She became gentler, more charitable, less intolerant beneath the influence of his apparent reverence and homage.

Miss Mallison had few correspondents, none at all amongst men. By some unmarked steps she was drawn into a correspondence with Harry. It had begun apparently in a casual way. At his departure he had begged her to send him a photograph to Dublin. There followed promptly an acknowledgment of the favour in a letter so cunningly worded with questions, that an answer

was almost necessary. It must be understood that this young man was an adept in establishing this sort of communication. The feeblest right or cause seemed to authorise him to pen an amusing epistle, and to contrive that it should need a reply. Many other letters resulted between the cousins. Clever sketches, chatty notes, small gifts of music or books, kept the ball rolling. Advice was asked, withheld by Anne, finally hinted at, and so on. At this time the young lady appeared to have forgotten that she had intended to invite Mabel and Dolly Spencer during the winter. Perhaps it was because their brother was so remiss in calling, about this epoch. He had not left a card since the dinner-party a fortnight ago.

Anne's new maid had been established in Portland Place more than a month. In the estimation of her mistress she had already proved herself a companionable young person. There was a refinement about her manners and appearance, as well as a reserve in her speech, which enhanced her value, and proved her superior to ordinary attendants. She betrayed no idle curiosity or inclination to gossip, after the wont of Anne's former maids. She never talked without being drawn out, appearing both cold and shy. It was highly satisfactory to Miss Mallison that suggestions of what she should put on were never made, and that a prompt obedience was paid to her orders and wishes. Mrs. Tucker, Lady Mallison's elderly waiting-woman, was now never called into counsel, and an unknown amount of peace resulted to Anne in the dominion of her wardrobe. Maria Garcia was certainly a treasure in point of tact, and to have a personal attendant not only quick-fingered but quick-witted, was highly agreeable to her mistress.

After a fortnight, Anne, from being serenely satisfied with Maria, became interested in her. This silent, deft girl, whose intuitions were so rapid, and who never evinced a spark of her original animation and fierceness, seemed something of a riddle. There must be strange depths in one who could at will subdue absolutely an impetuous spirit, and conform obediently to rules.

Miss Mallison waited and watched in vain for some ebullition; she even went out of her way to be exacting, in order to tax the patience of her maid to the utmost. But nothing stirred her. She had folded up and put away all passionate impulses with an exemplary propriety which yet was rather disappointing to Miss Mallison. The young lady had looked forward to an interesting study. There came one dull afternoon on the which Anne was seated on a low chair near her bedroom fire. The masses of her beautiful brown hair hung over her shoulders. Maria had been washing this glorious mantle, and was now engaged in softly brushing it. It was a soothing, mechanical action, which seemed to exercise a mesmeric influence on both girls. The silence had been unbroken for half an hour. Anne's head was bent down, and as the twilight advanced her attitude became still more absorbed. Her eyes were fixed with a sad gaze, and her mouth drooped. The distant sounds of carriage traffic, and the little spurts of gas jetting from the fire, were all that broke the stillness in the room.

"Talk to me, Maria. Tell me about your country, your people. Were you ever in love?"

The sudden parting of the veil which hung over Miss Mallison's eyes seemed to dissipate a cloud of stillness.

As the young lady flung back her hair, she looked up at her maid, and noted a flash of light in her eyes.

"I am very dull– amuse me. Really, were you in love?" There was a sceptical raillery in Miss Mallison's voice which Maria apparently caught. She laughed shortly, in the mirthless way of a Spaniard. For a moment the brush ceased to operate.

"*Dios de mi vida!* (God of my life), Spanish girls they are ever in love. A breath does make of them a flame. From the time they leave the cradle till they go away from their father's roof it is ever the same—even afterwards it is too often the same. Only it is not sorrowful, the sort of love that Spanish girls do feel. It gives what you call charm, excitement, to their life. It is a pleasure that they seek, as they seek a bull-fight, though it does make them tremble. To see him, the man of their fancy, only pass their window, to return his salute in the street, to meet the touch of his fingers with the holy water in the church—*Dios eterno!* these are pleasures which cost them no painful heart-beats."

Maria's voice was more animated than usual. To Anne's quick hearing there was a vibration of scorn in it. An indescribable emotion of fear, almost of self-reproach went through her. She recalled Harry. She thought perhaps it was the zest of a similar excitement which intercourse with him lent to her life. It had certainly made it pleasanter. She said, with a sharp intonation :

"Put down the brush. I am tired of it."

The maid turned silently to the toilet-table, and laid down the ivory implement. Her face betrayed no resent-

ment for the unusual tone of asperity. She was faintly smiling, as though recalling with disdain what others called love. Her eyes had a preoccupied look.

"Come here, Maria. No, not there. Stand in front of me, where I can see your face. So you think the love of your countrywomen is a contemptible thing? What a strange girl you are! Are you afraid of me? Is that why you are always so silent?"

Maria lifted her eyebrows eloquently, and brought her hands together in quick denial.

"Afraid of you, dear lady—of you, who have so noble a heart? Oh, no, never!"

Anne was abashed beneath that fervent "Oh, no, never!" For a moment she remained silent. Anne was not wont to condescend to familiarity with her inferiors, and she hesitated a moment now. Yet she was not in the least afraid that this girl would presume upon her notice. She spoke slowly and emphatically, so that every word might be intelligible to her hearer's mind.

"I have been watching you every day since you came. I do not understand why you are so unhappy. I am distressed to see you so quiet and sad. It almost seems to me that you are always thinking about some one, and that you are angry with that person, perhaps brooding on revenge. I hope it is not so."

Then Miss Mallison halted and surveyed the girl curiously. She had been taken unawares by her stately mistress, and stood dismayed, with eyes dilating. She made a sudden gesture, as if to deny the imputation.

"You know it is true, Maria, and I am sorry to feel that you are in trouble. Do not turn your eyes upon me

in that way. If I have discovered a secret, you need not be angry or afraid ; it is quite safe with me."

Maria's two small hands stole up to her face. She spread them over it as if to hide its ever-varying expression. The action was almost child-like.

"It is too late now to hide your looks. It would have been better to give up thinking first. You could not altogether disguise your feelings. Maria, I should like to know what it is all about. Will you not confide in me? I will be your friend, and help you if I can. You are in a strange land ; you seem so friendless. Besides, you are different from most people in trying to conceal your trouble. Perhaps I am different too in some ways, and so I can feel better for you. Let me help you. There are so few deople I can help in any way. Do not try to deceive me."

Again Anne paused, seeming to expect an answer. The little figure stood silent and motionless before her.

"I think that you must love some one very much. Nothing but love could transform your face as I have seen it transformed. I could see that you despised those girls you spoke of just now, who make a pastime of love, who can put it on or off in a light, easy way. To me, too, that seems dreadful."

A long-drawn, suffocating sob broke across Anne's words. Maria trembled visibly.

"Who is this that you brood about? Was he false to you, or is he dead?"

Another heavy, tearless sob shook the maid.

"If you cared for him so much, why did you leave your country? I think if I loved anyone very greatly—I

mean, if such a thing were possible, it would be life to me to breathe the same air and speak the same language."

With what appeared like a gesture of defiance towards an incredible case, Miss Mallison flung back her long hair, and revealed her face more fully. For a few moments she sat in silent reflection. Meanwhile the darkness deepened. There was but a dull glow in the grate, and the faint reflection of a street lamp in the room, when Anne was roused from her reverie. The wild aspect of her maid kneeling at her feet startled her. The upturned face, so small, so white, so anguished, with the fire burning in lustrous eyes, were things visible in the semi-darkness. She looked like one suddenly distraught, yet Anne was not afraid. Long gasps for breath that would not come, and shuddering tremors shook her, but neither sobs nor tears made grief intelligible.

"Poor girl! Have I touched a wound? What a pity! what a pity! What is it? Can I not help you? We all have to bear something." Then leaning forward she almost whispered: "Does some one you love not love you back? It seems shameful, I know. Did you let your heart go out to him without quite understanding or knowing how? Perhaps you knew him when you were a child, and grew up together. Say it is so. There is no real shame in it. Such things happen sometimes to other people." A flush mounted slowly to Anne's face. In the twilight it was not perceptible. Yet she shielded her face with her hand as she broke off her speech suddenly.

But she had unbarred the floodgate, and a great wave of tempestuous emotion burst the barrier at her touch. The

Spanish girl, in a wild access of uncontrolled passion, threw her arms about Miss Mallison's knees, embracing them closely. Her voice sank to an impressive whisper, no longer broken by any sobs.

"Ahi! ahi! I am truly *Maria de los Dolores.* In sorrow did my mother bring me forth. It was a *dia de luto* (day of mourning). Dear lady, and has this great pain of love not come near to you at any time? Oh, bless the good God that you are at peace, that you know not the music of one man's voice, that you fear not his frown, that his careless words cannot grieve you, that your life has never been a fever of dreams and hopes. Oh, my dear, beautiful young lady, who I do feel to love much already, who I shall be grateful to evermore, you are indeed blessed amongst women. It seems not possible at all, for you have a heart so deep and strong behind your cold looks. The hottest of fires burns ever beneath snows."

With every vehement phrase she spoke, the girl's breath came shorter. The palpitations of her heart might be seen as her bosom rose and fell. The light of intense passion shone in her large, sad eyes. The wrathful demon had awakened at Anne's unguarded touch. The slight frame was shaken by convulsions of wrath or grief; it was hardly possible to decide which, or whether it was not a mingling of both. Presently Maria fell back a little space from Anne, loosening her fierce clutch; and, lifting locked hands above her head, as if in a delirium of unconscious emotion, she muttered unintelligible words rapidly in her own tongue, repeating constantly the sad "ahi! ahi!" of Spanish women in hours of suffering.

"Maria, what does this mean?" said Anne, at last roused to an angry resentment of the feeling she herself had evoked. "You forget yourself strangely. You must try and overcome such violent passion. It is unwomanly, not modest, to proclaim your love in this way."

The girl paid no regard to this reproof, seeming not even to hear it, as she rocked herself to and fro in an agony of grief.

"*Oh Dios! Dios eterno! Dios de mi alma!*" she repeated frequently. At last, turning her lovely eyes, luminous with passion, upwards, in a voice of tragic vehemence and heart-rending anguish, she offered up a prayer aloud:

"Oh, hear me, eternal God, and pardon the passion of a sinful soul whose love is an idolatry. *Oh, Virgen de los Dolores* of those who are broken-hearted, look down in pity on thy daughter who is full of grief, and a forsaken one. Oh, calm the restless aching of her heart, the madness of her brain. Let the scorching fire of a love which gives no rest or hope be put out quickly, and guide her footsteps back to the heavenly way from which she wanders desolate."

Her extempore utterance was rapid and fervent. Anne only guessed from the action of her joined hands, from her uplifted eyes and supplicating looks, that she was praying.

"*Yo soy como los oleados* (I am like as one who has been anointed). Dear lady, I have shown to you the nakedness of my heart. It is as if I were at the point of death," she said quietly, after she had dropped her eyes on Anne's face and had seen the mingled amazement, pity, and dis-

pleasure there. She stood on her feet once more, appearing to recover her composure rapidly.

"Forgive me, dear lady," she said humbly, as she hid her eyes a moment with one little hand; "it shall not happen again that I do forget myself."

"Light the candles," said Anne quietly, ignoring the past, and bringing an every-day air into the mysterious gloom of the room. Mistress and maid were once more restored to their relative positions, and confidential moods seemed shut out behind rose-coloured curtains and wax lights.

After this strange scene, for many days Maria was subdued to a yet more calm and silent demeanour than formerly. Anne did not again find her sitting idle with a needle in her hands, and her eyes fixed on the sky. She was continually occupied, though quiescent, and drooping almost to apathy, transacting her daily duties with a sort of mechanical precision. She almost appeared like one whose feelings had been dulled with an excess of pain. Anne still continued to watch her covertly, showing a certain degree of coldness towards her, but secretly bewildered at the command this frail little soul had over some great passion. She suffered so quietly; for it was certain that she did suffer, and that some terrible experience of love had been hers. Anne thought at times that Maria waited or looked for some one to appear, with a sick fear of misfortune or loss to be made positive. It was in the streets that Maria's drooping spirits seemed to revive. In unguarded moments she looked about her with a wild and anxious stare of search or inquiry. Miss Mallison being fond of exercise, walked regularly. On fine days she

would frequently go as far as Hyde Park and back home on foot. At these times her maid was always her companion; and Anne could not help observing how full of eager life and animation Maria's dark eyes looked as they scanned the faces of the passers-by. The shops had no attractions for the Spanish girl, and it was not towards well-dressed ladies or showy equipages that she directed her attention.

Once, in the middle of Regent Street, a sudden, startling exclamation from the maid drew Miss Mallison's attention from a young man passing near to them in a hansom. A fair, comely young man, of soldierly aspect. For a moment Anne had stared hard at him, thinking it was her cousin Harry. As her glance dropped to Maria's face, she saw that she too was gazing at this man with a face livid and discomposed. Unmindful of passengers on the pavement, the maid stood stock-still, her eyes fixed on the retreating vehicle which bore the man out of sight.

"What is the matter, Maria? I beg you to behave yourself in the street," said Anne, angrily, observing the attention of people fixed upon them.

"I did see a spirit, I think, Miss Anne," said the girl, turning round at her lady's touch with an anguished melancholy in her eyes.

"Do not stand still, at any rate. In future, when you walk out with me, I hope your ghosts will have the manners to keep out of the way. If you cannot behave properly out of doors I shall leave you at home. I hate to be stared at or to attract attention." The girl, trembling, dropped her eyes, and said, with a quick resumption of meekness:

"Oh, no, *Senorita*, you will not be so cruel as to shut me away from the streets. To me it is so great a pleasure to look at the life and gaiety." Nevertheless, Anne felt it was not only life and gaiety that Maria's eyes looked for. This young lady had said she hated to attract attention, but it was certain that such a pair as this could do no less. The one tall and stately, with dignity and coldness in her bearing; the other undulating along the streets with the grace of a sylph, flashing dark eyes, by turns soft and fierce, up and down with bewildering rapidity.

On the same evening Anne was again reminded of Captain Mallison by receiving a letter from him.

Croker had entrusted the letter to Maria to deliver to her young lady, who was upstairs in her room.

"Your English lords and gentlemens, do they all write the same way, Miss Anne? The letters of your country have no grace, are all so ugly, thick and large. And the writing it is not easy to read."

Maria scrutinised the letter in her hand as if unwilling to part with it, apparently with no idea that her curiosity was impertinent. She lifted her eyes at length, and saw that Anne smiled in a shadowy way as she extended her hand for the letter. She thought it an odd question indeed, but Maria often asked odd questions, and Anne generally answered them. There was something about her simplicity that was satisfactory. There was no deception or pretence about such direct queries.

Miss Mallison knew who the letter was from, but she turned it over, scanning the postmark and superscription as if they were interesting. She was in no haste to master the contents. She received so few letters, and never

important ones. At last she looked up at her maid, who seemed to wait for an answer. Anne's voice was full of its society intonation when she spoke.

"Oh, no, Maria, not all! Everyone in England has a different way of writing. We all copy pot-hooks and round-hand when we are children, just as we say our prayers. It is a custom of our country. We grow out of such restrictions. Indeed, we imagine our writing reveals our characters. If we can acquire the habit of curling our tails or loops the wrong way, our reputation for originality may be established. Before all things, you know, we English profess to be people of character."

Maria did not grasp any sarcasm in Anne's speech. She lifted her eyebrows in an interrogative way, not comprehending. Anne continued, pointing to the large, loose writing she held:

"This is written by a man, my cousin, who is a soldier."

Raising her eyes carelessly, Anne perceived that Maria started at the word soldier.

"Ah, then, *your* lover was a soldier!" she said to herself; continuing aloud:

"We call this a bold and dashing hand, such, I suppose, as a martial pen ought to write." She lifted it close to her eyes. "Certainly there is nothing scholarly, or humble, or reserved about it." Anne remained musing a few seconds, with the letter unopened upon her knee. When she did read it at last, she smiled many times over it. There was a novel pleasure in receiving these chatty, half-confidential communications.

Anne had never corresponded with any young lady

friend, and knew nothing of the entertainment afforded by amusing gossip and chit-chat. Sometimes the light-hearted mirth apparent in Harry's epistles moved her pity. He was able to forget the weightier things of life so easily, and had the faculty of obliterating all that was disagreeable from his facile mind. There was absolutely something childlike about his nature, which seemed to deny any consolidation of vicious tendencies. Anne forgot that this easy pliancy might equally militate against firmness of virtues, or stability of better instincts.

Something maternal in her soul went out towards him. Herself, she had never been childlike, and a sort of compassion for her own earnestness at times overcame her.

CHAPTER XI.

A WEEK after Anne had received the letter spoken of in the previous chapter, an invitation to Dullingford came from Mrs. Mallison. This invitation was couched in affectionate terms. Her aunt's friendliness rather astonished Anne, who knew her to be an undemonstrative woman.

"Of course you will not think of accepting, Anne. It is a most unreasonable time to ask you at. You know we have two dinner engagements next week, and Dullingford, as you always say, is very dull."

The family were at breakfast, and Anne tapped her egg with decision.

"But of course I shall accept, mamma. The snowdrops and crocuses are in flower, and Aunt Laura's tiresome boys have gone back to school. Why should I forfeit rural joys? What special novelty can attach itself to a dinner at Judge Marshall's, or a feast in the City? Papa, do say a word for me. Don't you think it might do me good to vegetate for a week? My sensibilities are too acutely sharpened against the brilliant intelligences that surround me. Aunt Laura will soothe them."

At this appeal, the Judge, who had his head buried in the *Times*, dropped it.

"Eh, what? Dullingford, did you say? Who wants you to go to Dullingford?" He lifted the covers of the

dishes before him and plunged a fork into a kidney. His hand arrested its progress, when Anne said promptly, "My cousin Harry."

She looked not a whit abashed. Though she knew it would inevitably come to light that Harry would be at Dullingford, it was not for this reason that she made such a prompt confession of the agency which guided her movements. Anne deceived herself often enough, but she was guileless in her dealings with others. Besides, there was no earthly reason why she should make a secret of the matter. The Judge knitted his bushy eyebrows. It did not escape Anne that he looked ill-pleased.

"The good boy wants encouragement, eh, Anne?" he said, with sarcastic emphasis. "Little Jack Horner, tired of sitting in his corner, I suppose. Yes, no doubt he'll pull out a plum some day, and say 'See what a good boy am I.'"

Anne did not retaliate. Perhaps she put no special interpretation on the words.

"You are not fair to Harry, papa," she said tranquilly. Then she turned to her mother. "I suppose I may go, mamma?" Her ladyship made no further demur in the matter, mollified by the idea of Harry's presence at Dullingford. A hopeful vision of Anne's settlement in life flitted before her.

On the day before her departure Anne went out early in the morning, accompanied by Maria, with the intention of executing a few necessary purchases. Contrary to her usual custom, she did not return home to lunch, and Lady Mallison, after waiting a quarter of an hour, with what she

considered sinful indulgence, ordered the meal to be served without delay. John Spencer, who had failed to turn up on that Sunday afternoon on which he was bidden by Anne to the Portland Place house, had, since the dinner party, neither been seen nor heard of. Anne's resentment was bitter against him. She said she did not care, but she needed to assert this fact too often to herself for it to be true.

On this day of Anne's transgression the young man dropped in, and found Lady Mallison enjoying her cutlets and claret in solitary state. She could not do less than invite him to take the vacant chair. Very soon Anne's irregular conduct was explained to him.

"Anne is going to Dullingford to-morrow, you know, and had some little matters to transact. No one would believe the fuss Anne makes about her laces and gloves."

John, who appeared somewhat dull and careworn, looked across the table with a quick glance of surprise. He had often, in earlier days, when Anne was more expansive towards him, heard her bewail her compulsory visits to Flatshire. This was a strange freak on her part. John poured himself out a glass of claret before making answer, in a light, unconcerned way:

"To Dullingford! What rural joys does Miss Anne expect to partake of in February?"

Her ladyship regarded this as a favourable chance for throwing light on Anne's inclinations. There were old scores to settle with John, and Lady Mallison was not above wreaking a revenge for anxious hours. She read her daughter's visit only in one way. There were no

confidences exchanged between mother and daughter, but the mother believed Anne's visit to signify a predilection for her cousin's society. Something would surely come of it, and she was rejoiced to think that Anne's choice lay in a safe direction. As yet, Lady Mallison had not sounded the Judge with regard to the matter, having an idea that he cherished less advantageous hopes regarding his daughter. If her husband really favoured John Spencer's pretensions as a suitor, she was very determined to put a spoke in his wheel.

"Ah! but, Mr. Spencer, Anne will have her cousin Harry to amuse her. He is coming over from Ireland on purpose. It may be a very pleasant thing to stay in a country house under some circumstances. He will devote himself completely to her amusement, no doubt. You may not believe it, but Anne likes to have a deal of attention, though she makes light of some cavaliers."

Lady Mallison's cold eyes looked at John Spencer with intentional meaning. He did not appear a whit disconcerted. He laughed oddly, and it was her ladyship who felt uncomfortable.

"Oh, yes, Lady Mallison, I can quite believe it. I give your daughter credit for being a young lady of keen perceptions and appreciative tastes. When she gets a husband, he will, as a matter of course, be her devoted slave."

This did not look as if John expected to be that gentleman. As they lingered over the luncheon table, Lady Mallison dismissed the notion from her mind, and began to approve better of this man than ever before. He was

awkward in his manners, and there was no need to eat with such rapidity when no Court was sitting. Still, he was an intelligent listener, and did not talk in that half incomprehensible way like Anne and her father. The clock on the mantelpiece tinged the half after two. Still, Anne came not. Finally, the hands travelled round to three o'clock. A brougham drove up to the door, high-stepping horses making a loud clatter. John turned his eyes to the window, and rose from the table.

"You are going out, I see, and I must be off. I suppose Miss Anne is remaining out to luncheon. She leaves St. Pancras by the midday train, of course?"

Apparently, he intended Lady Mallison to answer a carelessly hazarded question, for he retained her hand a moment.

"Really, Mr. Spencer, I can't say. It is most tiresome of her to remain out so late. She promised to call with me on Lady Torkington this afternoon. What did you ask about trains? Anne always leaves them to Croker to find out. She has no method whatever. I never know what to expect of her—though, to be sure, no one can say it is the fault of early training. I know she wrote to her aunt to say she would arrive in the afternoon at Dullingford. I don't know what will become of her, so helpless as she is, travelling without a maid. Did you ever hear of anything so unreasonable? Mrs. Mallison declines to put up an attendant. I really am surprised that Anne is willing to endure such inconvenience. But there, now, Mr. Spencer, it shows, doesn't it, that her heart is fixed on going? We are left to guess the attraction."

In vain the lady shot a meaning look out of her inexpressive eyes towards the round, pleasant face confronting her. No shade of annoyance or soreness was betrayed by the barrister.

On the next morning, at 11.45, Mr. Spencer was to be seen issuing from the Metropolitan Station at King's Cross. His trousers, though not by any means new, were turned up, and his boots were splashed with mud. To the manner of fine raiment or a smart appearance John was not born. Herein he sinned against Miss Mallison's critical susceptibilities. It was drizzling considerably, but he carried no umbrella. Indeed, the quality of his hat scarcely demanded such a protection. This was no dandy-looking swain bent on captivation. Having crossed the road without any particular care in picking his way, the young man entered the St. Pancras Station. Arrived within, he shot round the ticket offices at a great pace, sending a searching glance into the ladies' waiting-room, and finally gravitating towards the book-stall. The person whom he sought had evidently not arrived. Would she arrive, or would she draw back at the last moment? Evidently Mr. Spencer thought the lady would come, for he purchased a good supply of papers and magazine literature of a light order, suitable to a corrupt feminine taste.

Having made this judicious selection of frivolous works, John compared a large silver watch he wore with the great clock overhead. Ten minutes to twelve. No Anne. He walked the length of the platform to where the train bound eastwards was drawn up. He looked into every carriage, and then walked down the platform again. Five minutes

to twelve. He went outside the station, and witnessed frantic travellers inciting leisurely cab-drivers to haste, or shouting to porters out of windows.

The stately chariot of the Mallisons came not. Was Croker or Anne to blame for want of punctuality? John's face beamed cheerfully as Anne tarried. It was strange to hear him humming a little song to himself. Three minutes more elapsed. The hour of grace was nearly passed. John pondered on whom he should bestow his bundle of literature, and looked towards the porters speculatively. Then a four-wheeler, with a modest black portmanteau on its roof, jolted its occupants beneath the archway. A quick-witted porter laid prompt hands on the luggage.

"Where for?"

"Dullingford. Be quick!"

Without observing John Spencer, Anne got out of her cab, paid the fare, and ascended the steps. A second person in the vehicle was engaged in collecting rugs, umbrellas, and a travelling-bag. The spectator picked her out as a stranger. As Anne's calm eyes swept the platform they encountered John's. She gave a slight start. He could not see her hands lock tightly within her muff.

"You here, Mr. Spencer! What an age since I have seen you! Surely duty does not cruelly call you to Flatshire? Without waiting for a reply she turned to her maid.

"Maria, bring those things up to the train before you go. Mamma will not be satisfied unless you can tell her I have no dangerous travelling companion. There is

no time to lose. Excuse me, Mr. Spencer. I have my ticket to get."

She moved forward, but he stretched out his hand to arrest her progress.

"Here it is, Anne. A fine instinct assured me you would be late, and it would have been a thousand pities to disappoint the party at Dullingford."

He laughed in a pleasant way. The sixteen shillings expended had been an extravagant speculation, considering the lady's coming had been a doubtful matter. From under Anne's straight brows a singular glance was cast towards him. "A thousand pities," she repeated mechanically.

"Come along," he said, in imperative haste, "or after all you will be left behind."

She walked in a stately way beside him up the platform. Regaining her composure, she said:

"No, I did not mean to disappoint them. Do you think if I put my hand to the plough that I ever look back?" she added, with a sort of calm defiance.

He looked down at her with mocking laughter.

"Is it so serious a case as that?—you putting your hand to the plough? A stubborn piece of ground for you to redeem. By all means let us hasten, then."

She dropped her eyes, and her voice was wonderfully submissive in a moment.

"Why do you want me to go, John?" Just for an instant she paused, continuing, with halting words: "I have a strange presentiment about this journey. Perhaps, after all, it would be better not to go."

He looked at her steadily, still speaking in a light tone of raillery.

"Are you going into danger? Is it a presentiment of evil? It is well I came to say good-bye."

Her angry spirit rose once more at these words. She looked straight before her, with a set smile now. It was a cold smile, which did not improve her.

"I am going to Dullingford to please another, actually to make a sacrifice of myself. Can you believe that? My presentiment is, that I am making a grievous mistake in breaking the law which has ruled my life—the law of inclination and self-love, as *you* know, Mr. Spencer."

She stepped at this moment into an empty carriage, the door of which stood open. As she seated herself, he said:

"Then you are quite sure there is no element of self-pleasing in this martyrdom, Miss Anne? It would comfort me vastly to know." Then Mr. Spencer got into the carriage, stowed away her bag, unstrapped her rug, and deposited his bundle of literature in a distant corner. Maria, having handed Miss Mallison's small articles to him, withdrew herself a little distance from the train. The two within the carriage were absorbed in their own affairs, and did not notice how her eyes scanned each carriage with wistful hopelessness.

John's last words smote Anne's conscience. When he had said it would comfort him vastly to know that there was no element of self-pleasing in her sacrifice, she only heard the doubt in his voice. What could it matter to him whether she was going gladly, and of her own free

will, to Dullingford? She looked him straight in the face, as she said:

"I am afraid I cannot comfort you, then. I make no pretence to unqualified virtues. Every martyrdom has some compensation, surely? Even virtue is its own reward, good people try to persuade you. My sacrifice has Cousin Harry to balance it."

An expression new to Anne's experience passed over her companion's face. Still his voice was only full of good-humoured irony when he remarked:

"Oh, then, the prodigal will cheer your leisure hours. How can I compassionate you? What an excellent opportunity for you to expatiate on the better way!"

Then John got out of the carriage, and stood leaning with his arms on the window.

"The train is waiting for some Royalty," he said, as he looked down the platform and saw red liveries bustling about.

The light was shining on Anne's face fully. She changed her seat, and then said, faltering a little:

"Did you come here only to see me off? There was a suspicion of doubt in Anne's question.

"I believe so," he said, smiling, with yet an earnest look as he rested his eyes on her downcast face. "I thought it would be some time before we met again, and I remember that I owe you an apology for not coming one Sunday that you asked me. I was called suddenly out of town. Yesterday your mother told me where you were going to-day. By-the-by, is that pretty girl standing over there the new maid concerning whom Lady Mallison prophesies

evil? For once her ladyship is right. There looks to me something uncanny about her. Rather wild and untamable, I should say. I have seen eyes like hers in a prisoner's dock often enough, but I have sometimes thought they would be better placed at a madhouse window."

Mr. Spencer had dropped his voice, speaking more soberly now. Anne laughed audibly, with careless contempt of fear. She looked at Maria, who stood in a fixed attitude, gazing backwards and then forwards.

"How absurd you are! Are all strong-tempered people to be shut up? You will need to enlarge the borders of your lunatic asylums, then. I like things and people not easily subdued. I value chiefly what resists me, what does not bend to my will. I never would have a dog, because they always fawn on me and lick my hands. Your tractable, docile spirits leave you nothing to do or hope for. You are right: Maria is not at all tame, and I do not understand her moods in the least. It is agreeable to me to have a puzzle always at hand, especially in a subordinate position, where it is not an impertinence to stare at her and to make speculations regarding her past and future. I have so few subjects, you know, on which to exercise my able understanding, and time hangs heavily on my hands frequently. My new maid interests me so much that I do not like to leave her even for a week. Suppose she should do something unusual, and I not be there to see and admire!"

Anne feigned her disappointment with an admirable plaint in her voice.

John burst out laughing. The train giving evidence of

departure, he removed his elbows from the carriage window.

"Good-bye, fair lady; let us hope nothing extraordinary will occur before I see you again. That will be a long time. Not before March at the soonest."

Anne leaned forward quickly.

"Then you will be away again when I come back. Where have you been since Christmas?"

Anne had heard vague rumours floating about in legal circles, which she had resolutely shut her ears to. Yet at this moment she seemed to hang upon his answer. He looked away, and did not see how earnest her eyes were. He frowned a little, and rubbed his chin in an absent way.

"Oh, at Exeter, of course. I go down again to-morrow. There are no end of complications there." He laughed again, but not with his usual vigour of mirth.

"To Exeter?" said Anne—"home again." Her glance might have been construed as one of relieved surprise. "Give my love to Dolly and Mabel."

Mr. John turned and looked at her, gravely now. His voice was full of derision.

"Your love? I thought *you* at least were above empty courtesies, Anne."

She drew back quickly, so covering any confusion that might make itself evident. The train was already moving out of the station, and with a parting wave of her hand towards Maria, who bowed deeply to her young mistress with a foreign grace, Anne was carried out of sight.

As Mr. Spencer followed the lithe little figure of the maid down the long platform, meeting her once more face

to face as he went out of the station, a feeling of disagreeable surprise took possession of his mind. He felt almost angry. Was this foreign girl, whom he had never seen before, wearing some familiar clothes cast off by her young mistress, or was he suddenly gone demented? What resemblance could there be between this pale-faced, black-haired waiting girl and the stately beauty he had so lately parted from? It was impossible to trace any likeness in contour of feature, and their form and stature were absolutely different, yet the subtle impression of similarity deepened. The maid must have caught some trick of expression from Anne. Her way of raising her eyes, the droop of her red lips, might be imitated. John Spencer was a physiognomist in an unscientific way. He closed his eyes a moment, thinking to sober his judgment. But instantly the connection between maid and mistress made itself again evident. Maria spoke, asking a porter to call a cab. The inflections of the Spanish girl's voice, as she made her demand, speaking a foreign-accented "Thank you," recalled Anne's tones. Imitation could never go as far as this. John no longer entertained a notion of mimicry, yet certainly no resemblance between Maria Garcia and Anne Mallison had ever been observed by others. John Spencer went home very thoughtful, and sat idly smoking the greater part of the afternoon. Perhaps it needs a lover's eyes to detect the faint similarities in others which recall the beloved one.

ASTRÆA.

PART II.

CHAPTER XII.

UNDER ordinary circumstances, Captain Mallison did not love Dullingford. That he should now volunteer to spend ten days at the home of his fathers, out of the shooting season, caused Mr. Mallison to suspect some serious project in the wind. At no time of the year were special festivals celebrated at Dullingford Hall. Preserving was not one of the Squire's hobbies, and when his neighbours were engaged with their cover-shooting and the entertainment of friends, his house remained empty. He laughed in his sleeve when he read of the butchery of *battue* weeks. It was a satisfaction to him that no unnecessary pheasants, demanding artificial food supplies and the attention of supplementary keepers, strayed about the woods and copses of his demesne. Admirably adapted as were the covers of the Dullingford property for the maintenance of game, it was reckoned a scandal in local opinion that they should be beaten blank. As the Squire turned out no cradled birds, and made a poor pretence of preserving, an invitation to shoot with him was not enthusiastically welcomed. Harry, being fond of sport, was mortified not to be able to brag of massacres on the paternal acres. There were always, of course, enough partridges to supply the table, and a surplus to go to the game-dealer at the county town. Hares and rabbits also were kept down by every device

which could fill the larder and replenish the stock-pot at the Hall. Mrs. Mallison's soul abhorred butcher's bills, as a matter of course.

The reason of Anne's journeying into Flatshire at this epoch was not far to seek. She had said she was making a sacrifice, "breaking the law of inclination," which was partly true. At the onset, when Harry had pressed her to come, the proposition had been distasteful to her. He had several times hinted at a wish to patch up a reconciliation with his father, and Anne had seen in this desire a laudable effort in the right direction. She knew that since the Dublin affair no communication had passed between father and son. Certainly, if Harry was now anxious to commence overtures of peace, it would not do to discourage him. She wrote back with more effusion than was her wont, warmly commending him, and counselling him by all means to go to Dullingford if his father was ready to receive him and overlook the past. There was a very evident taste of didactic condescension in Anne's letter to her cousin. Still, when Harry received this missive, he smiled complacently over it. The fish had risen with such surprising innocence to his tentative fly. When he wrote again, and said how great a favour she would confer upon him by coming also to Dullingford for a week, Anne felt indignant. What right had he to make use of her in this way? Then Anne, reading further, felt a sort of sympathy for him. The silent rooms, the dull meals, the homilies of his stepmother, would be less unendurable with a companion. And Harry might certainly make her visit pleasanter than it had ever been

before. After all, it was no great sacrifice to abandon the dancing and feasting in town for a few days. How often had she declared to herself that she had given up expecting life to be enjoyable? It would be quite as endurable at Dullingford as in London.

So a cold little missive of consent sped its way to Dublin, and there followed in due course of time a formal note of invitation from Mrs. Mallison. The girl did not in any way realise that by this scheming on Harry's part, and consent on her own, she was committed to having acknowledged a special understanding between them. Anne was no diplomatist, even in matters of flirtation, in which the most transparent natures sometimes acquire duplicity. She had not an idea that her cousin had paved the way to being thrown much in her society. Intimate relations with any young man except John Spencer, Anne had never had, and the artifices of lovers and admirers were unknown to her.

To Mrs. Mallison's mind it had long been desirable that the heir, her stepson, should marry and settle down, without prolonging the season of wild oats and robbing her offspring of sums set aside for their benefit. This good lady had found her lord deaf to suggestions of mortgages. He would not thus free Harry from difficulties. Provision might be made for the second family by the putting down of expenses and the cultivation of simple habits; but at the slightest resentful hint cast towards Harry's future possessions, he showed a spirit loyal to defend the unity of the ancestral territory against the plots of a lawyer's

daughter. Her inherited craft was of no avail against the dull obstinacy of this Flatshire Squire.

Captain Mallison arrived at Dullingford the day before Anne was due, and got through the preliminaries of eating his humble pie fairly well. He at once contrived to convey to his stepmother the impression that his terms of intimacy with his London cousin pointed to something further. Having so diplomatically arranged for Anne's presence at Dullingford, he knew that the opportunity must be made the most of. Harry had considered that most women would yield to his captivations in a week. When Anne was not within sight, he felt sure of his ultimate triumph. It was only when face to face with her that he realised a certain insecurity. No word of love had been breathed between them, and he scarcely knew how it might be led up to. Still, it was in the tone of a conquering hero, of a lover well assured of success, that Harry announced his intention of driving a dog-cart to meet his cousin at the station. This appeared a natural arrangement to Mrs. Mallison, and, moreover, did not interfere with the coachman's duties at home. There was always plenty to do for her domestics. They were no pampered menials, like Lady Mallison's, as she declared proudly.

"You can tell her, Harry, that her luggage will be fetched in the course of the evening. She brings no maid. I told her that I was unable to accommodate one."

Now Harry liked things to be done decently and in order. That is to say, he appreciated comfort for himself and others. His brow darkened. Anne was a young lady not accustomed to travel about unattended. What could she

think of such an intimation? Mrs. Mallison was making his cousin's visit more unpleasant, more of a martyrdom, than it needed to be. Taking into account the vast number of empty chambers in the servants' wing, it was absurd to refuse Anne her attendant. The young man controlled his wrath with an effort, merely saying, as he took up his hat:

"I shall tell Bridger, as I go through the village, to send his tax cart at once for her luggage."

It must be known that horses and vehicles were few in those days at Dullingford.

"It isn't necessary at all," said madam, sharply, to her stepson. "There's such a bill as never was every month from Bridger for fetching and carrying. The girl can surely do without her finery for one evening. I don't suppose you will find fault with her appearance, whatever she wears. There are some 'returned empties' to go up to the stores to-night. Her trunks can come back in the cart, and will be here by nine o'clock."

Nevertheless, Harry did instruct the extortionate Mr. Bridger to call at the station.

When Anne was landed on the little country platform, she felt forlorn and slighted at its desolate aspect. There was no one to meet her. A diminutive porter and station master, full of dignity, surveyed her curiously. A strange and elegant young lady, without attendant or male companion, was a novelty here.

"For the Hall, Miss?" questioned the brisk little porter with some judgment. "There ain't nobody here for you as yet. They're mostly behind time, they are."

Having assented, and watched the efforts of her juvenile patron to shoulder her trunk, Anne marched off finally to the shelter of the little waiting-room. It was a cheerless, bleak prospect that presented itself to her out of doors. The girl found herself thinking of the warmth and luxury in Portland Place. Life materially had always been hung on C-springs to her.

"I sees young Squire a comin' along at a tearing pace. That 'ere black horse that he's a driving of ain't half broke. There'll be a accident some day along of it," announced Anne's friend, with a grin of consolation, as he thrust his head in at the door of the office where she sat in resigned patience.

At the sight of her cousin, cheery and comely, Anne's courage revived.

"So sorry, Anne, to have kept you waiting. I started in good time, but this thundering brute has nearly done for me. He bolted clean away for two miles on the Wrexham road before I could turn him. All your small traps here? They'll send for the trunks directly. What, only one? Lord bless me, you are a woman to be proud of. Won't you be a comfort to your lord and master!"

He laughed in a pleasant way, assisting Anne to settle herself in the seat beside him. The sense of cold and desolation began to thaw beneath Harry's broadly beaming smiles and hearty welcome. He was so evidently glad to see her.

"You ain't afraid, Anne?" he said, as the great, gaunt horse started off with its head down, as if intending to

bolt another three miles on the homeward way. Considering Anne had little experience in equine demonstrations, and was only accustomed to drive behind sleek, well-trained carriage horses, she might have been excused any timidity. She had no nerves, she said, shaking her head with a little derisive negative.

"One must die somehow."

"Oh, but I'm not such a philosopher as that! I'll take care of your life, never fear. You are cold," he said, lowering his voice in a caressing way. She had shivered slightly, drawing her fur cloak round her. "Here, let me put this rug over you. It is a deuced cold country—clay soil."

She suffered him to wrap her in many folds with a care which was new to her experience. For Anne, you must remember, had never been intimate with any young men. They had danced with her, and cloaked her at balls; they had paid formal afternoon calls, and handed her teacups; they had talked conventional talk concerning pictures, theatres, and books; but that was all. The safeguards of propriety had hedged her in securely. Only in the domain of her mind had she been independent and latitudinarian. She thought now that it might be rather pleasant to be waited on and cared for sedulously, with deference and distance, of course. For Anne's finely-grained nature was easily offended by familiarity.

"The mother and father all serene? They made no fuss about your coming here, did they?" he asked, as the horse settled down into a quick trot. She looked up at him, bringing her eyebrows down slightly.

"Papa thought the dulness would soon weary me," she said, coldly.

"I shall be responsible if it does; it was very good of you to come."

Anne thought it was, and said nothing in reply, looking straight before her at the bleak prospect. The aspect of flat, rain-sodden fields and leafless hedges under a dull sky was not encouraging.

"Been very gay, Anne, since we last met? Yes, of course, I know you have. Dinners and dances without end, of course. What a good little coz to write to me! I thought you would forget me quite when I went away."

This was absolutely untrue, but it was a pretty beginning. She did not deny hastily, but, after a little pause, said:

"I don't forget people soon, if they interest me."

Harry transferred his reins to his right hand, and laid his left upon Anne's muff. Not for more than a second, though; something in her face warning him instantly to remove it. The slightest approach to intimacy was checked by her cold look of disapproval. The girl was a prude, he swore, as he bit his lip beneath his moustache. There had been a shade too much of certainty or of appropriation in the familiar gesture, which Anne resented with pride in arms. Yet she had said he interested her.

"I am your cousin, Anne. You hardly treat me like one," he said, with a reproachful look, after another little pause.

"How should I treat you?" she said, promptly, lifting her eyes to his face.

"You might be a little more friendly," he said, with a sort of soreness which he really felt.

"I do not like to be touched," she said, gravely. "I did not mean to offend you." Then there was another longer silence, and Anne felt that a chain, light as a cobweb it might be, but still a chain, had been drawn about her by her coming. It had been a foolish yielding to his request, an unconsidered action, now she thought, and the consequences might not be pleasant. She had committed herself to a certain amiability and graciousness towards Harry by consenting to be his companion. She even felt, in a vague way, that she had committed herself to something more, something she could not exactly express. Anne did not put it before herself that she might be drawn into a nearer relationship. Young women of her nature, relying on their own strength of mind, are apt to deceive themselves in strange ways. The microscopic eye of a more self-absorbed woman would have detected clearly the fine threads of difficulty being spun about her.

A very few days at Dullingford sufficed to satisfy Anne that a country life was not congenial to her taste. Moreover, her position was made more irksome to her by the attitude of her relations. In reality, the girl knew nothing of the country, and the insignificant amusements and interests which administer to the happiness of the dwellers there. She had visited at different seasons in various counties; but they had been grand houses she had stayed at, on gala occasions, chiefly. The side of life presented to her at these times helped to connect country existence with a variety of entertainments. The calm monotony of

weeks and days between festive gatherings was unknown to her experience. Hunting, county balls, coming-of-age celebrations, and shooting carnivals, seemed only to show her another phase of pleasure-seeking. But now, at this time, in the silence and monotony surrounding her, her own inactivity seemed more palpable. Her want of pursuits and interests was more striking in the country. Having nothing to do, she was not prepared to get up to a nine o'clock breakfast, day after day, to find a damp drizzle prevailing over the stretch of park land. A saunter through a dilapidated conservatory could hardly be called exercise. She could not well get out on foot, and there were no available carriages. The dog-cart and the black horse were, it is true, at Harry's disposal; but when it appeared to her a matter taken for granted in the house that he should drive her out daily, she rebelled, refusing to go, with a resentful petulance that sat strangely on her. Billiards she abhorred, though she suffered Harry to instruct her daily for a couple of hours in the science of cannons. Dullingford had no modern library worth speaking of, and Anne could not feed on Fielding, Smollett, or ancient histories. Only a daily paper came to the Hall, and she missed at least a dozen weekly publications taken in at Portland Place, which filled up idle hours. In the matter of eating and drinking, Anne had never been known to be critical; but the simple, almost meagre, fare provided seemed inadequate to satisfy the requirements of hunger. Anne passed by a dish frequently because there seemed barely enough for all. On former visits to Dullingford her father and mother

had been with her, and the penurious mistress had been under the necessity of stretching a point to meet their requirements. But for a girl of Anne's age, likely soon to become part of the family, there was no need to depart from the customary order of roast and boiled. Anne drank champagne daily at home to dinner, but here the thinnest of clarets was all that was offered to her, and Mrs. Mallison looked very sour when Harry helped himself from the sherry decanter.

Anne for the first time realised that at home she fed on the fat of the land. At a distance the flesh-pots of Egypt seemed more desirable. Without betraying herself, Anne secretly chafed at her aunt's treatment of her. She was no longer a young lady to be entreated courteously, as an honoured guest. She was now one of a family party whose going or coming could not be expected to alter domestic arrangements. There was no fire lighted in her bedroom early in the afternoon, and there were no guests invited to meet her. When Anne saw that she was assigned to Harry's charge as a matter of course, in a way that even compromised her in the eyes of the servants, she rebelled more vigorously. She resolved, after three days, that she would go home early the next week, not fulfilling her promised term of ten days. There was no diplomatic scheming about Anne. She made no feint of engagements or a message from her mother to summon her. As John Spencer had told her once, with laughter which did not please her at that time :

"You'll break your neck some day, Anne, if you ride so straight at your fences."

Probably what galled Anne's sensibilities more than anything else was her uncle's behaviour towards her. He treated her with a tolerating condescension which for a reputed clever young lady was hard to endure. She herself held a mean opinion of his intellect, for he was narrow in his views and slow of perception, the very reverse of her father. Old world conservative prejudices, born and bred in him, had been fostered by the simple, uneventful life he led. To him Flatshire was the chief among counties, Dullingford the one place in the county. He was intolerant of new ideas and the march of progress, treating women with a marked intimation of their inferiority. These foibles had not been so patent with other visitors in the house, on previous occasions, and Anne was surprised to find how very antagonistic she was to her relatives. She herself was accustomed to be addressed by her father as a reasonable being, to be allowed to express an opinion freely, as well as to arrogate to herself a full share of intelligence. Her uncle habitually spoke to her as though she were a spoilt child, whose whims and fancies were to be kindly humoured. He tolerated her naughty behaviour and radical sentiments with the good-natured pity of one who was certain of superior strength. This girl, who rated her own mind and views as rather above his, was naturally ill-pleased to be compassionated and made light of.

"Your father does not think highly of women. If I were your stepmother, I would refuse to be placed on the low platform he has built for her," said Anne one morning to her cousin, as they threaded the damp

moss-grown walks of the shrubberies on a more than usually dry day.

"My word, Anne, but it is not for *you* to say so! My father treats you with uncommon favour, it seems to me. Why, Old Harry has his boots on in your presence."

She turned her face to him, and opened her eyes wider than before.

"Do you mean that the cloven foot is hidden from me? Do you really intend me to understand that your father is more intolerant towards other women than to me?"

You see, Anne was not guilty of circumlocution. Harry thought he had grounds to consider her exacting. In his opinion the old gentleman had put on an exemplary mood of amiability and conciliatory speech.

"By Jove, rather! In his opinion no woman's soul ought to be her own."

Anne struck at the branches of the shrubs with her umbrella.

"Oh, indeed," she said, with sarcastic emphasis, walking on in silence. She was half inclined to ask if Harry did not think the same. By-and-by she said, in a serener way:

"I think I must go away early next week, Harry. Monday or Tuesday would suit me."

This was Friday, and the young man knew that he had not made the progress he ought to have done in four days' time. In fact, he was aware that he was not getting on well with Anne, that he had made no decided advances in intimacy since her arrival. At present he did not feel anything like being in love with her. She had been so difficult to approach that he mentally compared her to

electricity. To touch her incautiously might evoke a dangerous spark to destroy his hopes: for Harry had fully resolved that Anne should marry him. His father was disposed to condone a good deal of the past in view of this achievement. They were on excellent terms at present. Moreover, the difficulty encompassing this conquest strengthened his determination. Yet his well-planned project for bringing her down to Dullingford was bearing no fruit. He had daily communication with her without advancing. It was imperative that he should make the most of the opportunity, and somehow the opportunity could not be seized. Never before had he found women draw back so perversely from his advances. His radiant *bonhomie*, his repentances, his tenderness, his fertile wit, had always pushed a way. But in this case the tender glances of his blue eyes awakened no response, the lingering pressure of his hand appeared unmarked, and his most significant words glanced aside. This was an impregnable fortress indeed!

"What pretty language you use, Harry! It is a great pity I have no ear for music. Your voice and your quotations might win you distinction otherwise," said Anne, languidly scornful, one evening.

This was in the twilight, after a poetic outburst from Captain Mallison. The young man was made to understand that she was ill-pleased with his reference to herself as "a phantom of delight." He went out presently, cursing her obdurate perceptions. I am not sure that he did not say something to himself about "pearls before swine," which was very ill-bred if he did.

CHAPTER XIII.

At dinner-time Anne announced her departure on the following Monday, Harry feebly combatting her decision, and finally yielding to it. Later in the evening, the old Squire challenged his niece to a game of chess, to which she agreed without enthusiasm. Mrs. Mallison, in a remote corner of the drawing-room, was nodding over some domestic needlework, but Harry came and looked on at the game for half an hour, his hand exercising an irritating effect on Anne as it rested on the back of her chair.

She moved her pieces about mechanically, not exerting herself as she was able. It was purely a defensive game on her part. Mr. Mallison had naturally challenged her to a scientific game with considerable condescension. To his evident surprise, she proved no contemptible antagonist. Presently Harry went out of the room, and Anne had no longer the grace to keep up appearances. Her play became still more unconsidered. After a short struggle, she was defeated.

"Really, my dear, you are a very fair player. Stay; do not go yet. I have a word to say to you, Anne."

She had risen to put away the board, and he laid a detaining hand upon her, glancing towards his slumbering spouse. Mrs. Mallison had large, prominent teeth. When

she closed her mouth these had the appearance of being left outside. When caught napping she was not a beautiful object to behold. In spite of her peaceful appearance, the Squire lowered his voice.

"So I hear you're tired of Dullingford already, young lady. Harry tells me you are going home on Monday. Have you and he come to loggerheads? What sort of a game are you two playing? Is it fast and loose on your part? In my days a girl knew her own mind, and didn't double across country in this way."

Anne, with her hand on the ivory pieces, ready to transfer them to a japanned box, gripped the King fiercely.

"A game, uncle! I do not understand what you mean," she said, haughtily, lifting her head and bringing down her straight brows. Even her cold eyes flashed a moment. The Squire shrugged his shoulders.

"Not understand! 'Pon my life, you are the daughter of your father, ready to twist and turn like an eel. Was there ever a young lady born into this world who did not see matrimonial views in a man's eyes? Do you mean to pretend Harry's intentions haven't been clear to you—that you haven't encouraged him?"

Anne swept the pieces at one movement off the board into the box. They were fragile, and of Chinese workmanship, costly enough toys. That was nothing to her. When she spoke there was no alteration in her voice, nothing to indicate the shock she had received. The construction put upon her actions by relations and friends became suddenly clear to her. Why had no one warned her? Had her father suspected that she was being

inveigled into this entanglement? Perhaps he favoured this match. Her will was powerful to conceal the anger mingling with surprise, perhaps dread, that she felt. In clear, incisive tones she said:

"I had not reckoned on my charms as being equal to fix the unstable element of my cousin's mind. So you think, uncle Henry, that Harry wants to marry me? He has not told me so. I fancy liberty is sweet to him yet." It was vain for Anne to fence or use sarcasm here, and she knew it. It was a bludgeon that played against her rapier.

"Every dog must have his day. Your father won't pick holes in my son's coat. Oh, you may stare, young lady, but he knows something about wild escapades, for all he sits on the Bench now."

At that moment the door opened, and the butler entered with the evening letters. Anne generally received those from home by the second post. Longing to escape, she waited only for the unlocking of the bag. Three letters were handed to her.

"Good-night," she said briefly, not touching her uncle's hand, but taking her letters up quickly, without giving him a chance of further speech. She passed with rapid steps up the broad, dimly-lighted staircase, stumbling down the long corridor towards the large, dingy apartment she called her own. It was quite early yet, barely nine o'clock, but she felt exhausted with the effort to restrain her anger and fear. She would not go downstairs again this evening. When she reached the refuge of her room, she locked the door, and setting down the bedroom

candlestick upon the centre-table, threw herself into an arm-chair. She raised her hand to her head with a movement of despair, pushing back the masses of hair. She was more like her father thus. It seemed that the effort to think clearly and to understand her situation were too much for her. She sighed heavily, looking about her with a confused stare. It had come upon her suddenly, and she was not prepared to cope with the gravity of her situation. If Harry had indeed understood her friendly intercourse, her cousinly interest, to signify love, it was a terrible predicament. A family rupture might result, for the old Squire had been very much in earnest. Moreover, Anne was no flirt, and had no inclination to seek admiration or court attention. The bare idea of having encouraged hope and sentiments of affection in her cousin's heart shocked her. You see, she was terribly inexperienced, and being imaginative, was unduly sensitive to other people's pain. Had it indeed been for love of her that Harry had been willing to forsake his evil courses?

The light in Anne's room was dim, for Mrs. Mallison's candles were of cheap composite, and the old-fashioned flock-paper aided the gloom. There was no fire, of course, and deep shadows were in every corner of this large apartment. On Anne's arrival, Mrs. Mallison had said, casually:

"You will not mind doing without a fire, Anne. Your room is on the south side, and the days are getting warmer. I am short of a housemaid at present." Mrs. Mallison, was, however, always short of a housemaid.

Anne was now shivering violently, though she wore a

high cashmere gown. Her hands were loosely clasped over her knees, but she seemed unconscious that she held any letters in them. At last she rose to reach a shawl from the wardrobe, and in doing so dropped her correspondence on the floor. She stared a moment as the letters fluttered to her feet, stooping at length indifferently to pick them up. Then she laid the letters on the dressing-table, and lighted the candles there. Her own face, reflected pale and stern in the mirror, caught her view as she put down the match-box. She lifted her hands, and supported her chin with them both, regarding her image steadfastly, inquiringly.

This was a frequent trick of Anne's when she was alone. It appeared almost as if she was a puzzle to herself, as if by sheer physical force she intended to grasp an unwilling or elusive mind. Her lips syllabled faint words as she looked. It was louder than a whisper, for her quick breath seemed to force audible utterance:

"Does he really love me?"

Her large grey eyes, distended and startled, seemed to question with stern insistence. She could hardly have wished to meet an affirmative, for the solemn look of fear faded from her face. Her hands dropped from the clasp of her throat, and her mouth curled in a scornful smile. Anne derided her fear or her vanity. In the same tone as before, only with softer eyes, she made answer to her own image:

"No, no; I knew it could not be so! I could never have married him as long as—John——" Here Anne caught her breath quickly, and looked round suddenly, as

if there possibly might be some listener. A flush mounted slowly to her face as the words died into silence. Slowly her eyes fell from the mirror and rested upon the letters. They had been put down carelessly. The superscription of the uppermost one caught her glance. A spasm of surprise contracted her brows. She lifted it, turned it over, brought it nearer to her eyes. Why had he written? He never wrote to her—and yet—yet, how well she knew that stiff, crabbed writing!

Again she put it down, as if unwilling or fearful of breaking the seal. She took up another; this was from Lady Mallison. Her ladyship's letters were of a type not ordinary in these degenerate epistolary days. They were couched in stilted and formal language, somewhat after the style of the Complete Letter Writer. She kept a copy of this admirable work in the secret recesses of her davenport, though Anne was not aware of it. The letter began:

"My dear Anne,—A week has now elapsed since your departure, and as you have only favoured me once with a few brief lines, I am under the necessity of imagining you are in good health and rejoicing in country pleasures. Your papa and I dined at Judge Marshall's on Thursday. The party assembled to meet us was a select one, and all the arrangements perfectly simple, as I am informed is now the fashion in the most distinguished circles. What we are to do with our handsome silver *épergnes* and dessert dishes if this simplicity comes into vogue, I am at a loss to know. I must, however, remark, that in my opinion Lady Marshall had cut down her *menu* without much considera-

tion. There was barely enough to supply the requirements of the company. Miss Marshall, who has just returned from Paris, having completed her education in that fashionable capital, is a lively and agreeable young lady. Her costume was extremely elegant, if somewhat striking, and her way of singing French songs was much applauded. Your papa was very satirical regarding them; but you know I never take any notice of his censorious remarks.

"I wish, my dear Anne, that you would take up music, or recitations, or art classes. You have no reputation in society, and considering your papa's distinguished position and talents, it is most mortifying to my feelings as a mother, when questioned concerning your tastes, to be constrained to say you have none. After all the money that has been lavishly spent on your education, it is *most* disappointing and unsatisfactory.

"Maria is getting on nicely with some plain sewing which Tucker has given her to do. I am glad to say that I hear no complaints against the girl, and that her behaviour is now respectful and quiet. But she appears to suffer from nervous headaches, and I fear she may prove delicate. She has asked my permission to take walking exercise daily, and in your absence, when her duties are light, I have consented. Your papa saw her the other day going out of the house, and was much struck by her appearance. His life is a continual worry with heavy duties, and he is looking far from well. Sir Joshua Brodrick says he is suffering from nervous exhaustion.

"John Spencer has not called since you left, but we heard strange rumours concerning him at the Marshalls'.

Being his mother's cousins, they are likely to be well informed." Anne looked up at herself before turning the last page. Again the strange, questioning gaze. She turned the page. "It is singular, as people have often remarked, that we have never heard John's name connected with any gossip or rumours of matrimony. Now, it appears that some love affair has carried him to Exeter frequently of late. He is engaged, or about to be, from what we can gather. Your papa particularly desired me to communicate this intelligence to you."

Anne laid down the letter. She was as white as her cashmere gown, but no longer cold. Her tongue was dry, her hands feverish. Again she interrogated herself, but now it was only a husky whisper that parted her lips.

"Did he guess? Has he, then, wished to spare me? Oh, father, father!" For a moment she bent her head as if overcome with an intolerable shame. Then, taking up the letter once more, she burnt it deliberately in the candle, not dropping the remnant till the flame touched her fingers. By-and-by, struck by a sudden impulse, she crossed the room to where her dressing-case stood on a side-table. It was an elaborately fitted silver-gilt concern, such as was appropriate to her wealthy station. Her initials were lettered in turquoise stones upon it. It was full of valuable trinkets, which Anne seldom wore. In the lowest tray of all, a few treasured relics were concealed. There was a sprig of heather, a scrap of writing, and a little silver locket. This last trifle, given her in childish days, seemed too inconsiderable to find a resting-place

here. Yet she cherished it. There was within it a photograph of John Spencer, a poor portrait, taken at a boyish stage of his existence. Still, the same laughing eyes and broad brow were to be recognised, though time had been unkind towards his hair, and the years had added thickness and power to his features. It had been given to Anne voluntarily years ago, and never in her womanhood had she asked for another. She did not now passionately rend this poor image of another woman's love from its case, or evilly entreat the trinket after the fashion of women scorned in three-volume novels. She did what was, perhaps, more natural. She tenderly, graciously smiled upon it, shedding hot tears over its surface.

"Oh, John! oh, John!" she cried, before restoring it to rest, "why could you not love me? Was it because I was not good enough? Oh, I would have been good if you had loved me! Ah me! ah me!"

Then Anne took up the second letter. It was in a bold, masculine-looking handwriting. It was from Dolly Spencer.

"DEAR ANNE,—I don't doubt you'll open your big eyes wide enough when you receive an epistle from me. You are such a magnificent, stately Minerva, that I am well aware you scorn to exchange ideas with weak humanities; but, as I have congratulations to offer, I feel sure you will pardon the boldness of a humble mortal. Divinities may, under the circumstances, even smile upon me, though I have had John preaching at me for an hour, assuring me I am unwarrantably impertinent in sending my wishes for

your happiness before the murder is out, namely, your engagement made public. To think that such a serene goddess should condescend to fall in love! You know I always like to take time by the forelock, so you must pardon this slight *empressement* on my part. I should like to be your bridesmaid, if you will ask me, as I have a great desire to see the happy, adorable man of whose good or evil report in India, Dublin, and other places I have heard often enough."

This sting did not touch Anne at all. She went on, with a fixed, horror-stricken face.

"You will probably be hearing news from here, shortly, also of a matrimonial nature; but I will not further betray the confidence of my belongings. John is with us in Exeter, as you are perhaps aware. At present he is up to the eyes in business. You will understand the nature of it shortly. Settlements may have something to do with it! My mother has promised to bring me to town in May or June, when this matter is concluded. Sha'n't I have a jolly fling! Now I must end, and if you think, like that stupid old fogey John, that my good wishes are an impertinence, don't answer; I shall not be huffed. Dolly Spencer is a good-natured sort of girl!

"Ever, my dear Anne,

"Your attached friend,

"DOROTHEA SPENCER.

"Love to the good young man."

Anne's scorn and loathing for the Spencer girls culminated. She dropped the letter, and buried her face

in her hands. The echo of a step in the passage, and the sound of a voice whistling softly, went past the door. She roused herself, lifting her haggard face once more to the light. There was confirmation more positive than all to come, probably. She fingered John Spencer's letter fearfully. She looked at the stiff, firm characters again and again. He had written himself, probably, to break the news to her. Oh, shame! shame! Perhaps he had a coxcomb's conviction of the state of her affections. John a coxcomb? Oh, never, never! She wronged him.

The Laurels, Exeter, Feb. 28th.

"My dear Miss Anne,—It is not often that I trespass on your attention with a letter, therefore I feel sure you will pardon me on this occasion."

Having mastered this prelude, Anne again raised her eyes to her own reflection in the glass. She smiled at it, somewhat in the way that a victim may smile at an executioner. Then she went on with the letter.

"My sister Dolly has declared her intention of writing to congratulate you on your rumoured engagement to Captain Mallison. She refuses, with a strange disregard of decency, to deny herself the pleasure of being first in the field, as she expresses it. It has been my part more than once to defend my sisters against your severe judgment, but on this occasion I pronounce an absolute opinion against Dolly's unwarrantable impertinence. I wish you to understand that this rumour, true or false, is not of our circulating. My family were even in ignorance of your visit to Dullingford. In apologising for my

sister's breach of good taste, I beg at the same time to assure you that if you are caused any pain or annoyance by her method of showing sympathy, I am not the person guilty of originating gossip. For the sake of a long family friendship, and many kindnesses from you, you will credit me with sincere regret for this circumstance. I know well how much evil and vexation a babble of tongues is capable of working. I hope that your visit to the country is passing pleasantly, though the weather has been execrable for the last week. Not that I notice weather under more ordinary circumstances, but, constrained by duty to remain here a few days, the condition of the atmosphere is more apparent than when I am in town, and full of congenial occupations. I had a line from your father this morning concerning some legal quibble. I was sorry to hear he was not in the best of health. His work is too much for him, I fear, and he will break down utterly some day.

"With kindest regards,

"Yours very sincerely,

"JOHN SPENCER."

So the world was wagging its tongue concerning her already. Yet that was not Anne's first thought. She read over the passage, "constrained by duty to remain," etc., and marvelled at the word duty where John's love was concerned. Anne's hands were clammy cold, like the hands of a dying person, but they did not shake. It was surely very strange for John to have written her such a letter. He almost disclaimed his belief

in her possible engagement. Was Harry, then, so contemptible in his sight, that actually he could not conceive of Anne accepting him? Was the girl to whom he was tied by *duty*, then, so much worthier? Could not she, Anne, too, say that to accept cousin Harry was the clearest duty before her?

Through the long hours of the night Anne sat rigid and unweeping in her chair. And in that silent watch she made her choice.

CHAPTER XIV.

On the Monday following Anne's receipt of her ladyship's letter, which had reached her on Friday evening, the mother received a reply. The contents of the curt note caused Lady Mallison joy, if not surprise. Matters had come more rapidly to a climax than she had anticipated.

Dullingford Hall, March 2nd.

"Dear Mamma,—The desire of your soul is accomplished! I am, after all, going to fulfil a woman's true mission by making an excellent marriage. Being interpreted, this signifies that my cousin Harry has expressed a wish to make me his wife, and I have given my consent to this very convenient family arrangement. It settles difficulties admirably on both sides, I am of opinion.

"Uncle Henry stands at present in the attitude of 'Bless you, my children,' with a constant smile upon his face, which I believe only gives a faint reflection of his inward satisfaction. Aunt Laura has further curtailed the number of breakfast dishes. Am I not one of the family?

"I have written to papa, but, in case he is not at home have sent the letter to his chambers. I know his clerk is prompt in forwarding, and the matter of his consent is of

course of vital importance. With the usual amount of love,

"I remain, your affectionate daughter,
"ANNE MALLISON."

To say that Lady Mallison was gratified would feebly express her supreme satisfaction at this happy termination of Anne's lot. The die of her future was cast for an orbit not eccentric. Here was an ending of doubts and difficulties. Dullingford property was certainly worth five thousand a year, and Anne would be hereafter protected against fortune-hunters and her own radical tendencies. If not a brilliant match, it was eminently respectable. And with a daughter so irrational, and so enigmatical, there might have been endless difficulties entailed upon the family. It was with no little complacency that her ladyship indited her maternal congratulations.

When, in the afternoon, the stately Mallison chariot appeared at Highgate, Mrs. Hepzibah at once divined its mission. A family event of importance had taken place, and Clara had come to announce the matter. The Turnovers were quite well aware that there was meaning in Anne's visit to Dullingford, though they had not ventured to hint a question. But Lady Mallison's demeanour was altogether familiar and conciliatory to day, and cousin Hepzibah felt her cousinly relationship once more. The announcement of Anne's matrimonial prospects was received by the three Dutch-dolls in silence. They worked sedulously at crewel chair-backs, with eyes cast down, discreetly waiting for mamma's comments before venturing

an opinion with regard to the bridegroom-elect. Secretly, they all admired him as the acme of good breeding, the *beau idéal* of good looks, envying Anne her good fortune in winning such a husband.

Anne's behaviour, in the eyes of her Dullingford relatives, was exceedingly strange. No exuberant mood proclaimed her happiness and satisfaction; no bashful smiles or inclination to meditation were manifested. She walked, to all appearance, quite fancy free. Only she was a little colder, a little more formal, than before, in her demeanour towards the Squire and Mrs. Mallison. When the engagement was privately announced by Harry on the day subsequent to Anne's game of chess with the Squire, neither the aunt nor uncle affected any surprise. Indeed, Mr. Mallison took the satisfactory view that he had hastened the conclusion of matters. They were prepared to offer congratulations to their niece in due form: but something in the bride-elect's manner forbade any jocular accompaniment to formal speeches. Anne did not by any means pose as a martyr, or unwilling victim. She was merely stiff and indifferent, with a perpetual icy smile hovering about her lips. It froze facetious comments.

"I hope you will be very happy, my dear," was the extent of Mrs. Mallison's venture.

"Do you doubt it?" said Anne, lifting her eyes, while the frigid smile almost became a sneer.

The Squire, indeed, as Anne was made aware, took off his boots and gave a premonitory kick with the cloven foot.

"So you thought better of it, my dear?"

Perhaps Anne did not notice his triumphant look, for she said, in the quietest way:

"The night brought counsel."

When she went home on the following Wednesday, it was under Harry's escort. She had weakly protested against the necessity of the companionship.

"Do you think I should let you travel alone, my queen?"

Such endearments were new to her. Her face flushed suddenly with what John Spencer might have called anger. Perhaps it was. She could not accept circumstances quite calmly yet. When Harry had come to her on the previous Saturday morning in the empty conservatory where she sat idly speculating on the growth of straggling geraniums, she had been fully prepared for his declaration. And he had been disagreeably surprised at her coolness and self-possession throughout. No sighs, no tears, no tremblings, augured well for his suit. Yet he risked it, pressing every argument he knew of into his service. Her quiet way of listening, her steady eyes, her cool, unblushing surrender of her upturned palms to his nervous clasp, and her quite audible, "Yes, Harry, I will marry you if you wish it," left so much to be desired. For Captain Mallison was in love with love, as many men of his calibre are. All the sweet influences of womanly proximity—the straying of locks of hair, the soft skin, the palpitating bosom, the silken folds, of a gown—were pleasant to him.

As for Anne herself, she felt a sort of disagreeable

surprise that an actual engagement did not at once alter her feelings or disturb her serenity. She had prepared herself to endure much that was hateful to her. Becoming the promised wife of any young man, he would be entitled to kiss her, to hold her in his arms, and ask foolish, fond questions. Anne overlooked the fact that she was a sort of goddess, as the flippant Dolly termed her. Perhaps she was a little disappointed that she could not feel a martyr after her self-surrender. But fate had not treated her cruelly in subjecting her to familiarities. Her lover, so far, was courteous, distant, considerate. She had no cause to complain of him. If he had ventured at once to kiss her warmly or possessively, she might have rebelled. But he contented himself with pressing her hand, and at night just touching her brow with his lips. On the Wednesday morning before she left Dullingford, he brought her an emerald ring.

"The badge of my servitude," she said, with her strange smile, as she took it from him.

He did not ask permission to put it on, after the manner of devoted lovers. But Anne did not know this was an omission. On going up to her room she slipped it over her finger, and at once passed other jewels above it. Amongst so many costly stones, it bore no exceptional meaning to others, though she could not forget it was there herself.

When Anne reached Portland Place the Judge was not at home. Lady Mallison sat enthroned on a crimson sofa in the drawing-room. She rose to receive her son-in-law-elect with an agreeable smile. There was even a certain

amount of *empressement* in her manner. Anne took an early opportunity of making her escape.

"Good-bye, Harry," she said, turning round, with her hand on the door, as if suddenly recollecting a duty to be fulfilled.

"I shall see you to-morrow," he said, moving across the room to her.

"You are going to stay in town, then?" she said, bringing down her eyebrows, as if not altogether pleased.

"Till my leave expires, of course," he said, admiring the turn of her shapely neck as she looked over her shoulder.

"That will be Saturday," she said quickly, as he took possession of her hand. "Good-bye." The hand was lifeless, and her eyes were cold.

When Anne rang her bell upstairs, Maria came promptly. Her face was flushed and her eyes feverishly bright. She advanced towards the low chair where her young mistress had seated herself, looking down in a way that might almost have been deemed impertinent or angry.

"How do you do, Maria? I am very glad to be home, very, *very* glad. It seems months since I went away. How well you look! You were always so pale before. Perhaps I give you too much to do. Why do you look at me like that? Oh! I see you have heard the news, and expect to see me transformed. The fire does not burn visibly, does it? How should I betray joy and thankfulness? My destiny is fixed. Do I look very different?"

Anne laughed in a way that was not at all musical. There was a visible embarrassment about her.

"Then it is quite, quite true, *Senorita?* To me it did hardly seem possible that you were one to love so quickly."

The maid was looking earnestly at Anne's face, but her manner was quiet and respectful.

"Oh yes, it is quite, quite true, Maria. You see, everyone gets married some time. Mamma has always impressed upon me that it is a woman's clear duty. You, too, of course, will marry some day, Maria. Perhaps you will go back to Spain and be happy." Anne sighed.

The maid, turning sharply away, lifted up the fur cloak Anne had thrown aside, and began to fold it up. When she had concluded this task, she came near to her mistress once more. Anne was listlessly removing her gloves.

"But you do love this gentleman who you will marry?" There was a tiresome persistence as much in her steady gaze as in her questions. It was not a topic Anne cared to discuss.

"We do not talk and think so much of love in this country, Maria," she said, lifting herself up, and speaking in a tone of disdainful rebuke.

The maid's large eyes opened wider, with a sort of pathetic appeal against harshness. She became suddenly pale, and fell back silently to the dressing-table, where she busied herself in straightening the toilet requisites. That evening, as she brushed Anne's hair, she remarked, in a constrained way:

"You will leave this home when you marry, Miss Anne, and take another maid, it may be?"

Anne parted her hair, and watched the girl's face in

the mirror. Maria was unconscious of this revelation, and she seemed absorbed in her thoughts.

"Not if you will come with me, Maria. But we need not think of it yet. It is a long way off."

The Judge received Anne on her entry into the drawing-room in a way that was not usual with him. He had not answered her letter, and she, in a manner, dreaded the first allusion to her engagement. She noticed at once that his face was haggard and his eyes were restless. His serenity was disturbed, and altogether he appeared ill at ease, in an unnatural mood of fierceness, alternating with grave preoccupation. Anne thought it had to do with her. It is natural to us, in moments of individual importance at any crisis in our own lives, to construe the unusual moods of those attached to us as bearing relation to our concerns. That any outside influence had affected her father's composure Anne never considered.

But the Judge was not alone absorbed in Anne's interests, or disturbed by the thought of her future. He had met Maria Garcia on the stairs as he descended to the drawing-room. She, drawing back at his approach, had noticed that he stared at her in a close way, and that he even looked back twice over his shoulder as he went down, as though some apparition were following him.

When Anne came towards him in the drawing-room, he put out his hand mechanically, not drawing her into a near embrace.

"So you have come back sooner than we expected, Anne," he said, in an absent way, just glancing at her.

She looked at him a moment, as though to recall his attention.

"Have you nothing to say to me, father?" she said, at length, with a sort of desperate appeal in her voice, though she had dropped his hand.

"Oh, ah, yes, I had forgotten! You are thinking of leaving us altogether. It is the way of the world. Is this a wise thing to do, Anne?"

He spoke with an indifferent voice, as if the subject was irksome to him at that moment.

"It seems the best thing for me to do," she said, turning away to hide the stinging sense of disappointment. "The only thing to do," she said, bitterly, after a pause.

Anne had expected to be derided, or pitied, or censured, but never to meet here with a calm consent or indifference to a decision which would affect all her future life.

"I do not understand you in the least, my daughter. The motives of your actions are hidden from me. What particular reason urges you to leave your home?" He spoke with a degree more of life, and Anne turned herself round to answer him.

The door behind was pushed gently open at that moment, and Maria appeared outside. The Judge looked over Anne's shoulder at the figure waiting in the shadow.

"My God!" he said, with a horror-stricken gaze, "who is it?" At his wild whisper, Anne turned quickly.

"I do bring a message from her ladyship, Miss Anne. She would have you upstairs to speak with her a moment," said the Spanish girl, in her usual gushing voice. Then she quickly disappeared.

When Anne looked round again, the Judge had fallen into a chair. He held his head with one hand, and was ghastly pale.

"You are ill, father," said Anne, tenderly leaning over him.

"It is nothing," he said, in a clear voice. "It will pass off. It was only a dizziness that comes over me at times. Go to your mother at once, if she wants you."

He had complete control over his voice, in which there was a ring of command which Anne did not dare to disobey. He lifted his hand with an imperative gesture, and she was compelled to leave him. But she was anxious for many days concerning him, and watched with a tender solicitude for further symptoms of disorder. John Spencer had hinted in his letter at a mind overburdened by its duties, and Anne was alarmed at this manifestation, which had so confirmed his words. Her father had never been subject to nervous fears or irritation before. Yet she had the discretion not to alarm her mother. Lady Mallison's wifely anxieties were liable to take the form of fussiness and complaint. Her aggravating cares and advice were apt to drive a sick person to distraction.

Meanwhile, on the Thursday and Friday, Harry came dutifully to pay his respects, and the Judge received him courteously, entertaining him as well as a reasonable son-in-law expects to be entertained — that is to say, not gladly, but if as of necessity. Anne herself was surprised at her father's suave attitude towards her lover. He was civil to him, more than sufficiently, in her estimation. The Judge's temporary indisposition appeared to have

completely passed away, and, as far as looks went, he was much as of yore. He was gay and cynical in public, but never lapsed into tenderness when alone with her. He seemed to avoid a *tête-à-tête*.

Strange to say, Anne possessed no portrait of her cousin. She had not wished for any exchange when her own was sent to Dublin. It was Lady Mallison whose sense of propriety took umbrage at this omission of duty. She drew Anne's attention publicly to this.

"You have not got a portrait of Harry, Anne," she said, severely. Then she turned to the young man, seeing Anne was silent, and added, "You must send her one." Lady Mallison supplied conversation and attentions where Anne failed. Notably in the case of her lover, she contributed to deficiencies, courting the young man kindly.

"Perhaps Anne does not want one," he said, endeavouring to look reproach at his *fiancée*. But she would not meet his glance, continuing to play with her rings.

"Oh yes, of course she does," responded Anne, lightly, with a little laugh. "She will treasure it vastly."

There was no play of mockery on Anne's features, though Harry felt it ought to be there. In spite of this little discordant note, the young man did send a photograph on his return to Dublin. His was a handsome uniform, in which he looked to advantage. What matter if it was a flattering likeness? That would hardly be likely to recommend it less to a young lady's notice. He wondered how she would look when she received it, and what she would do with it. He had seen rows of framed admirers, or of men admired, on the mantel-

boards of ladies' boudoirs. But it was possible Anne might shrine him solitary. He reflected upon this with satisfaction. After all, there was some charm in winning a wife who had not tossed her heart about hither and thither.

In opening the envelope containing the portrait, Anne dropped the enclosure accidentally. Maria, who knelt at her feet, repairing a bit of trimming on her young lady's dress, picked up the photograph, and turned it face upwards in so doing. Instantly she let it drop, as though it were a living thing that had stung her, falling back, and clasping both hands to her side. Without taking the form of articulate words, a low cry of exceeding anguish escaped her. It was like the moan of a dumb animal suddenly trapped or bereaved.

Anne looked down quickly from the letter she was reading.

"You are in pain, Maria! What is it? Poor soul, do not kneel. You will faint." Anne stretched out her hand to aid her to rise.

"Yes," said the girl, gasping for breath, "it is a great pain that has seized me—here—here." She touched the side of her heart in a resigned way, as though the pain were beyond remedy. "I do suffer it much, much at times. Permit me, dear lady, to leave you for a moment; it will pass, maybe, better alone."

As she staggered to her feet, not touching the hand held out to her, rather drawing away from it, her work implements fell unregarded on the floor. She stretched out her hands before her, like one suddenly gone blind.

In a tottering, uncertain way she left the room, touching the furniture and walls as if for guidance. Anne looked after her with wondering pity, and stooping, picked up the photograph. It remained unframed within her blotter for many a long day, unlooked at by any eyes save Maria's.

CHAPTER XV.

It was Easter before Miss Mallison again met her cousin, and, for some inexplicable reason, she chose to meet him at Dullingford. It was even at last apparent to him that he was not welcomed by her in Portland Place; that she avoided courtship beneath her own roof. The marriage was fixed for June, and this was the beginning of April. There was no legitimate reason for deferring the ceremony, and Anne made no strong resistance to the sealing of her fate.

On this occasion Anne did not go alone to Dullingford. The Judge, her mother, and a retinue of footmen and two maids migrated with her to the dull country mansion. There was a mitigation of Anne's discomfort now. Mrs. Mallison made efforts towards luxury on behalf of her Epicurean relatives. Everything was smooth sailing at present, and the Squire had dropped a hint to his wife that the Judge was to be entreated courteously. He was making very handsome settlements on Anne. Harry was feathering his nest prettily. Old Harry had put on his boots again, or rather a pair of elegant pumps. Anne hardly recognised him, so suave and smiling, so tolerant and courteous. Lady Mallison reproved her daughter in private for her cold and distant manner towards her future

father-in-law. She was vastly taken with his considerate attentions and deference to herself. Anne never played chess again with him, though the evenings were very dull. She had provided herself with some simple knitting, which kept her eyes and hands employed when Harry would sit beside her. There was one hour of the day that Anne dreaded at Dullingford—the post-hour. When the bag was brought into the drawing-room after dinner, her breath would come unevenly, and her strong hands would tremble like a sick person's.

"Do you expect some bills, Anne?" said Harry, lightly, one evening, marking her gaze riveted on her uncle as he unlocked the leather satchel.

She did not answer, but seeing there were none for her, took up her knitting once more. A packet of legal-looking documents had fallen to the Judge's share. This business correspondence he had sorted forthwith, and set aside. The winnowing process left him but one letter of interest. A sudden exclamation from her father drew Anne's looks towards him. But he did not at once declare the contents of the sheet he was perusing. It was only after a second reading that he glanced at Anne. Her proud, cold eyes were averted now, bent on a skein of wool which Harry Mallison held while she wound it. The Judge rose slowly, and crossed to his daughter's side.

"Here is news for you, Anne," he said, holding out his letter so that she might see the superscription. A stiff, crabbed writing. Her eyelids did not flutter, and no trembling of her lips betrayed the sudden emotion which

struck her heart. The Judge, half-suspecting the truth, did not know how to read his child's mind.

"Please put it down on my knee, father. I will look presently. It is to the last degree important that I should finish winding my skein, and not keep Harry a prisoner."

Anne spoke with light indifference. The Judge dropped the letter on her lap, and went back to his seat. But he watched her from afar off without her knowledge. When, by-and-by, having finished her self-imposed task, she took up the letter with well-assumed carelessness, it was clear that Anne became suddenly pale, and that the letter was not quite steady in her hand.

There was, in truth, a blinding mist before Anne's eyes, a dull, monotonous throbbing in her ears, and an exceedingly bitter pain in her heart when she folded up the sheet of paper and replaced it in the envelope. Then she looked across the room, and meeting her father's gaze, gave back no answer to his inquiry. She smiled faintly, and nodded towards him, holding up his letter significantly.

"I am very glad of it," she said; "it will, I fancy, be a great relief to John to be rid of such a grave responsibility as Mabel's affections."

The letter had contained the announcement of Miss Mabel Spencer's engagement to a very eligible country squire. The hints and intimations accorded to them all in Portland Place had, it seemed, been construed wrongly. It had appeared too improbable a thing for one of the Spencer girls to possess a legitimate lover, an aspirant to her hand. That anyone should love or admire Mabel Spencer had not entered Anne's mind. Thus, all

references to matrimonial intentions received from Exeter had been regarded solely as having to do with John. *He* was eligible, *his* affections were desirable. What more natural than that he should marry, and that he should choose some innocent-minded country girl whom probably he had known from her babyhood?

The short epistle received by the Judge on this occasion bore reference mainly to business matters. Anne was made aware by its contents that her father had asked him to become trustee under her marriage settlement. This was a sharp and sudden blow to her. In this capacity John would be thrown in her way, and the inevitable pain of meetings might need to be faced. Anne's self-abasement was deepened now. The faintest hopes that John might once have loved her died down. He consented to the proposition with the utmost cheerfulness. At the close of his letter he said: "Will you tell Miss Anne that Mabel's engagement, of which I have already hinted to her, is signed and sealed, and that I am quite *au fait* at settlements?" Oh! how cruel it all seemed at this moment!—that John should treat her future life in this jesting mood, and that she had made such a terrible blunder. Yet, if only she had hidden her secret well from him, if only he had not the faintest suspicion of her love, she could bear all that was to come. But Anne tormented herself with a thousand doubts. How could she be certain that she had never betrayed herself?

Miss Mallison, fully acquainted with Mr. Spencer's acute faculties, endowed him with an undue perceptive ability where she herself was concerned. He reasoned

admirably from circumstantial evidence in courts of law: why should he not reason equally well from the faint signs of a woman's heart?

But, from the moment Anne read his letter, she struggled to banish thought. She fought daily, hourly, against herself, against her yearning regrets and her love, propping herself up upon the feeble reed of honour. She must keep faith to Harry, come what might. She must never look at the past, or heed the voice of "might have been." So, to compass her own salvation from falsity, she set about life in a new way. By no chance would she sit alone, or remain unoccupied. Intrusive thoughts must be defied. Thus it came to pass that, when upstairs, she made Maria her constant companion, not suffering the girl out of sight. She compelled her to talk, to read, or to play on the guitar. It was as though Miss Mallison was possessed of some demon that needed exorcising. A fever of occupation had seized her. She sketched vigorously; she learnt to embroider and to knit; she translated Spanish, and talked immoderately. In fact, as she said, she became quite an everyday young lady.

It was seldom that Anne walked, but on alternate days she suffered Harry to drive her out. Her moods were feverishly bright and unnatural on her return from such expeditions. On these occasions of liberty, Maria appeared strangely unwilling to profit by the opportunity for taking outdoor exercise. She no longer made her frequent complaint of headache, or sought occasions to go out of the house. Her feverishly bright eyes had lost their former restless look, and were at times almost dull

and heavy. Maria Garcia appeared to have grown older, staider, less fierce, in her months of service in the Mallison household. Her pure skin had become sallow, and the quick elasticity of her tread had diminished. It was known by all the servants in Portland Place that the Spanish girl adored her young mistress with an almost frantic devotion, and that her lady's lightest word was law to her. Something of the maid's subdued mien and gentler speech was attributed by these to Miss Mallison's influence.

Anne's bedchamber at Dullingford was nearly the last in a long corridor, at the end of which there was an oriel window glazed with coloured glass, with here and there a clear pane, a diamond which had not been easily matched when broken, and which Mrs. Mallison's economical soul had not been willing to seek from afar. There was a cushioned seat in the window, and from this post of observation, which was situated above the entrance hall, the exits and arrivals might be seen. It was a pleasant look-out, and within convenient distance of Miss Mallison's room.

There seemed nothing unnatural in finding Maria seated here with some sewing. But, day after day, the work she brought here did not progress. If no one passed by, it lay untouched on her knee, while her eyes rested on the landscape. Yet she manifested a decided unwillingness to explore the shrubberies and extensive pleasure grounds. In agreeable weather, and under propitious circumstances, this was most unreasonable conduct. At last, it became a source of annoyance to the indefatigable Mrs. Tucker,

who made it part of her duty to breathe fresh air daily. The unflagging industry of the younger maid, under circumstances not demanding it, aggravated this austere lady.

"Now, what I says is this, Mariar. You've been brought into the country by a kind mistress, who don't expect you to work like a nigger. Why, it's a dooty as you owe to her to make the most of the oxygun."

Mrs. Tucker had once attended a lecture on "Atmosphere" at the Royal Institution, and held herself an authority on oxygen ever since.

One balmy afternoon the sun was shining warmly through the stained glass, flecking the oak floor with orange and purple patches. One side of the casement stood open, and the scent of sweet wallflowers near, and cowslips in meadows far away, was wafted up to Maria, who sat keeping her usual watch there. She had seen Captain Mallison drive off in his dog-cart, and had heard her young mistress speak some farewell words to him on the steps beneath. Afterwards Anne had called a dog to her, and had started with a basket in the direction of the woods. This was an unexpected move, for Miss Mallison usually came upstairs after luncheon, if she did not go out.

Subsequent to these departures, stillness settled down on the scene, and a vague sense of drowsy satisfaction crept over the languid little figure. The perfumed air moved stray locks of hair softly on Maria's brow. A blackbird set to work whistling lustily in the evergreens beneath the window. Strange perfumes, strange sounds these, to her senses.

The purple mantle of early spring hung over the distant woods. Only the meadows and undulating park lands were green and gay in glories already revealed.

Maria had never seen an English spring, and, as her tired eyes rested on the peaceful landscape, her spirit was refreshed, and seemed to come again to her as a little child's. The scorn and weariness of life passed away from her face. The spirit of praise and worship dwelt in her looks. The tranquillity and rest soothed her like an anodyne, subduing the pain that was in her heart. The despairing ache was lulled for awhile beneath softer influences. Her feverish dreams and paralysing fears were alike banished. Alternating passions of revenge and wild love died away for a space. As the girl looked long and steadily at the happy scene, she sighed softly. At last she bowed her head upon the cold stone of the embrasure, while her little fingers plucked at the wistaria flowers which clustered about the grey stones. After a time the clanging of the stable-clock roused her from her half-unconscious state. One, two, three, four. A whole hour since Miss Anne had gone out. Suddenly she raised herself from her half-reclining position, and folded up her work. She trod the long corridor with decision, and mounted the spiral staircase at the end of it with swift steps. This once she would put on her hat and go out, and taste that sweet, soft air beneath the budding trees. Yes, it would be quite safe. There was not the least danger of any chance meeting with him she wished to avoid. One little hour in the beautiful quiet woods could not bring her into any danger. The one thing she sought

to avoid was an unexpected encounter with the man she had loved. Yet Maria knew perfectly well that if she kept her present situation, sooner or later a time of meeting would come. Chance had favoured her so far, and her determination to keep indoors had helped her to remain undiscovered.

The hours of this sweet budding time passed quickly, and Maria, heedless of the lengthening shadows in the wood, wandered on too far. The afternoon was well spent, when, returning by a circuitous path, she came to an open glade beautifully spread with primroses. Here she made the discovery that she was lost, and sat down upon a felled tree to consider a way out of her difficulty. It was not many minutes before she became aware that another passenger was approaching the glade. Her slight feeling of discomfort was removed, and she waited passively for the help that was coming towards her. Whoever it might be, she felt sure of guidance. Yet, after a few seconds she held her breath, with her head poised in an attitude denoting attentive listening. Her eyes dilated, and her short teeth closed on her under lip. A spasm of fear or anger passed over her. Evidently it was a man approaching, for he whistled loudly and cheerfully. Why did Maria suddenly turn her face from the coming help? Ah, me! though she pressed her two hands resolutely against her heart, the effort did not avail to still its wild beating. Yes, once before, amidst pink oleanders and orange trees, she had listened to that same clear whistle advancing to meet her, growing louder, more confident, as it approached. But he did not know now who was at

hand, and yet he could carol the same song as of old, under different circumstances, with no diminishment of joy. A free, swinging step accompanied the cheerful notes, the step of a buoyant nature, of a man light-hearted, who knew no remorse or care. Verily Captain Mallison's affairs were in good order, and he had great reason to be thankful. Fair prospects were opening before him. What if he did not madly adore his future wife? Those heartburnings were not satisfactory in the long run, and at any rate Anne was exceptionally handsome, and was not likely to make him uncomfortably jealous.

When Maria became conscious who was approaching her, the time for flight had passed. It was too late to dart away, or even to move. Her only chance of escaping observation was by keeping still and maintaining an attitude of indifference to a passer-by. Her back was towards the footpath by which the man approached her, but she knew he could not have failed to see her sitting there. She drooped her parasol cautiously. If she remained as she was he could not see her face, and her figure would scarcely betray her identity. No ordinary passenger would go out of the way to confront a stranger. Yet Maria felt instinctively that Captain Mallison might go out of his way to look on a new face. Conflicting impulses struck her. If she fled she would attract his attention and give him reason to suspect that there was some one in the vicinity who had reason to avoid him. Should she turn and advance towards him, denouncing him as a cruel, faithless lover?

Suddenly this passionate longing to look at him, to have

him speak to her, was stilled. Words of contempt and reproach and anguish, ready to find utterance, died away. She recalled Anne: and Anne's nature had dominion over her. In a strange, unreasoning way she worshipped her young mistress, and was grateful to her beyond her merits. Maria was unreasoning in all her passions. For Anne's sake she would now keep silence and subdue the fierce, vindictive spirit which would fain declare to his face what manner of man she knew him to be

This girl believed that Miss Mallison loved her cousin, and because of this she must go away, otherwise she might in some unguarded moment wreck the happiness of her lady. It was possible, too, that Captain Mallison did love Anne, and would be faithful to her when she was his wife. Yes, certainly, as soon as this visit was over, she must seek occasion to leave Miss Mallison's service. But, oh Heaven! where to go? And while such bewildering thoughts racked the girl's brain, the clear notes rose louder and yet more gaily. The merry tune only paused for an instant when the man came in sight of a figure before him. It was but a song heard every day in villages round about Seville. It had a catching refrain, and Captain Mallison was proud of his accurate ear and good memory. They had helped to store many a gay ditty.

"By Jove! that's a neat figure," he had reflected in his momentary pause. Then he went forward more rapidly. He forgot that he had come to the wood to look for Anne.

The little figure did not move. Perhaps the girl was

reading, and her book was engrossing. It might be one of the rector's daughters. Who else had a key to these woods? No; that was hardly possible, for they were, by reputation, clumsy giantesses. Here was a dainty little form after his own heart. None of your majestic goddesses or long-limbed nymphs for him! Apparently Captain Mallison had dismissed Anne's stately mould from his recollection. Intentionally he trod upon a dry branch, which made a loud crack. Still the parasol was held closely to the girl's shoulder, and its fringe concealed her face. The lady was surely asleep or deaf. What a pretty foot was the one extended on the sward! By Jove! he *would* have a glimpse of the owner. A sudden disagreeable recollection flashed across him. Some one had said that Anne had a very pretty maid. Most probably this was the young person, taking her walks abroad in her mistress's absence. He must be careful. But there could be no harm in looking at her. He passed slowly round the felled tree, hitting with his walking-stick at the bracken. She must be reading, or very much absorbed in her reflections. Dark coils of shining black hair and the tip of a small ear were at last visible. The parasol could droop no more. But the girl's face was turned away from him, looking down the glade. One gloveless hand hung down on her black dress, the other grasped the parasol-handle closely. A few wild-flowers lay scattered at her feet. Captain Mallison gained courage at this quiet aspect. At last he was within a few paces of her. He ceased whistling, halted, stooped, gathered a primrose, and looked up. The girl had risen

suddenly to her feet, had turned, had faced him, her whole form, small as it was, full of dignity. He fell back a little, gazing at her pale face in unqualified surprise.

"Good Lord! Maria Garcia, is it you?" In the surprise there was a tone of resentment. Not a new face, after all!

"Yes, yes, Captain Henry Edward, who in this land bears also another name, it is me. The forsaken one—Maria Garcia—has found you at last; and oh! strange fate, she serves in the family to which you do belong; she receives the pay of the lady you will marry—of the lady you love, shall I say, rather?"

She put a strong restraint upon herself. Her manner was quiet. It was only her voice that was out of harmony with the still peaceful woods and beautiful sunset shadows. These seemed to say, "The day is over; be at peace. The heat and burden of the hours are at an end; the labour is past; the night cometh, when all things rest." But Maria heard not the voices. The burning rage within her was rising, the pains of slighted love were coming upon her more strongly every moment that he confronted her.

The young man seemed to recover from his surprise or resentment rapidly, for he smiled graciously upon her.

"You little witch! Upon my soul, you are prettier than ever. To think of meeting *you* in Dullingford woods! How, in Heaven's name, did you come to live with the Mallisons? Why have I never seen you before? Miss Anne jealous of her maid's good looks, eh? Lord,

what a joke! How long have you been with her?" He poured forth his questions quickly, and apparently without considerations of prudence. Meanwhile, the girl stood rigid and pale. Her figure was drawn into stiff lines unnatural to it. The young man did not, or would not, see that a wild passion laboured within her breast. The torture of repressed rage and despair concentrated in her glowing eyes only lent them new charms in his sight. He looked at her with admiration, pleased with the aspect of her beauty, noting the exquisite arch of her eyebrows, her slender nostrils and curved lips. There was something deliciously feminine about her delicate form, something wherein Anne failed. The intense, but yet quiet, force of Maria's voice he hardly seemed to notice.

"I am poor; I have no friends in this country—*your* country. I did need bread to live, for I did mean to live till I did find you. You did swear once by your God that you loved me, and I did travel over the sea a long way to find—a traitor. Since a long time I have doubted of your God! There seemed no shame to me to become a servant—it was honest. My destiny did send me at once to your friends, people of your blood, and of your real name. Ah! that was cruel to give a false name and to make my search so hard. No, no; you never did see me at all. I have been too wise, too cunning for that. Since a few weeks ago, when I did see your picture which you sent to my lady, I have kept myself from sight of you. I was a long time looking for you, and when you were found I no longer wished to see you. Ah! that is strange indeed."

Her rising passion began to be perceptible. But he rather liked its aspect, surveying her with critical amusement. As she looked at him and saw the half-pleased smile on his face, her eyes flashed more fiercely. One hand was locked closely over the stick of her parasol. It did not tremble at all, but the taper fingers went deeply into the flesh of her palm. The other hand was pressed against her heaving breast. The force of the pressure could not check its rise, though the blue veins swelled like cords, to prove the strong effort. Her tragic attitude, her scarlet lips parted, through which her panting breath came quickly, declared the violence of her feelings. The lovely curves of youth disappeared beneath the fury of her anger and long-cherished resentment. Revenge and wrath marred every line of her features. There was something almost terrible in the strength of the passion which stirred so frail a form. It seemed an extreme that love could hardly touch. Yet, though he saw her frenzied mood, there was no repugnance visible on Captain Mallison's smiling face. He had tamed such wild moods before, and this ebullition only meant the strongest love for him. He could not see that love touches madness and hate in the extremity of despair. He beamed a tender consideration upon her. A light, bright and winning, shone in his eyes, those frank blue eyes which Anne had praised once, and read amiss still. As Captain Mallison came yet nearer to her, he lowered his voice to a soothing tone, but he did not touch her.

"My pretty one, do you remember the evening I saw you last?"

She quivered from head to foot. Her eyelids drooped and hid the torture of such a recollection.

"*Dios eterno!*" A long sob. "Yes, I remember."

The words fell distinctly, though low. Her voice was full of heart-rending anguish.

"Maria—darling!"

Anne Mallison had never heard such a dulcet whisper from the lips of her lover, nor from any man's lips. Maria appeared to stop breathing. The young man advanced a step nearer; he almost touched her. Her parasol dropped suddenly from her hand, and she crossed both hands over her breast, as if to form a sacred symbol which should check his advance. She lifted her eyes once more with the courage of despair. In them, now, a solemn rebuke and urgent warning veiled the fierceness of her passion. Her lips did not move, but it almost seemed to the man that she had spoken, saying, "Go back." The voiceless *Retro Satanas* availed not. He looked at her curiously, still smiling. In vain the poor tortured soul struggled against temptation, with the well-remembered eyes holding hers. He sighed audibly and pleaded softly.

"Ah, well, those happy days are over, I suppose. Say they were pleasant days, Maria. We cannot pluck orange flowers here, can we? Do you remember when I made you the wreath and you looked like a bride? But we must not remember our days in Spain, must we?"

Her head drooped, turning slightly from him.

"They cannot be forgotten," she said, hoarsely; "the great God curses us with memories. Those He would

bring back to His fold remember and suffer the longest. Even in purgatory, to remember is our greatest pain, the priest says."

Then suddenly, like a distracted child, she cast a soul-piercing glance of woe upon him. Perhaps he had no soul to pierce. He was close beside her now, but her anguish did not seem to affect him. Her arms had fallen nerveless to her side. No cross guarded her heart. She no longer strengthened herself to resist, to repel.

He, perceiving the tension was relaxed, stretched out his hand to her. Her waxen face flushed. Love glowed in her dark eyes with a softer light.

"You darling little firebrand, why need those days be forgotten?"

At his touch she thrilled and sighed, as in answer to a master-hand. All the sweet musical intonations came back to her voice. She cried in low tones, yet not resisting:

"Oh, touch me not, I do beseech you. Have mercy, I am weak. *Ahi!* I, too, shall become a traitor. Oh, holy Virgin, have pity on me!"

She swayed backwards, slightly hiding her face in her hands.

"You used to love me, Maria; you did not mind my touch once," he said, resentfully, looking at her a moment in silence. A long-drawn shudder from Maria.

"Mind it? Oh, my God, to me it was heaven! But that is over. You were false."

He stood, stroking his chin a moment, and when he answered, it was deliberately.

"Was I ever unkind to you, my pretty one? No, you cannot say that. I behaved better than one man in twenty would have done. Still, there is a great deal that I can explain to you if you will only listen or give me another opportunity of meeting you. Circumstances were against me from the beginning. Where can I see you? Will you meet me at the lower end of the shrubbery to-night at ten o'clock? I don't suppose you'll stick at a convenient lie to escape waiting on my cousin."

He laid his hand on her arm again with an easy familiarity. But now, with a sudden revival of passion, she threw it fiercely from her. Taking two steps backwards, she leapt on the fallen tree, thus bringing her face to a level with his. The pretty, slender grace of her figure seemed more apparent now, and the furious spirit animating her seemed altogether at variance with her slight form. It was pitiful to see the vehement raging mood that moved her. She plucked at the bosom of her gown as if to relieve herself of some irritating or constraining influence. Then she broke into a laugh of mockery, stamping her feet on the log, and tossing back her head.

"Unkind to me? Oh, no; never were you unkind in any words. It is not your way to stab to the face. You only did run away and leave me for ever, with a smile on your lip and a promise for the morning—me who you did vow to love, whose whole heart you stole away." She bent her head a moment, and then once more turning to him, spoke, in awe-stricken tones:

"*Ahi!* Hope she is a beautiful maid when she is young and strong. She lifted me up on her wings with a holy

rapture. But she died, she died, and I fell wounded to the ground from the highest heaven. Ah, there is nothing so sad to look on, so grievous to remember. The beautiful one lies at your feet. You guilty one have killed my pretty angel of hope. She is decayed; she is quite dead. Never more shall I hear her happy voice. She was cruelly torn from me. Even God cannot make her live."

Maria stretched out a hand almost as small as a child's, and pointed towards the young man's feet, as though she really saw a dead presence there. The wild look of despair and inconsolable grief in her lustrous eyes, which filled slowly with tears, was terrible to look at. She was like a mother driven frantic by bereavement. Captain Mallison stood staring at her in silent amazement. An evident consternation was pictured on his features. She sprang lightly down from the trunk of the tree.

"Ah, you fear me now, Captain Henry Edward, though I am but a little thing with no power to hurt you in my body. You think that I am mad, maybe. So they said, too, in Spain after you had gone away. But it was not true at all." She approached her face to his. "I was ever thus, made up of strange feelings and many changing moods. Yes, look me in the eyes like that once more. Are they not as bright and beautiful as once you called them? Will they not still shine in the dark, dance in the sunshine, speak love beneath the stars? See my lips. Do they draw breath less sweetly? Can they kiss less tenderly? There are no pomegranate flowers here to match them. But it may be they have faded, because the blood in my heart it has a long time run slow and cold.

Their freshness it is past. The eyes you praised they are dull and heavy with much weeping and watching; the lips that have prayed so long in vain, they have no life. *Ahi, ahi!* the wine of love is drunk, and you do not thirst."

She paused, and then she flung both hands out, palms towards him, speaking in a lower key.

"What would you, then, explain to me now? Oh, it is too late. It is not needful for you to tell me that you love my lady. On your knees you should worship at her feet. She is too good, too pure for such as you. She will ever be cold to passion. Her eyes cannot look on sin without scorn and hate. Hush! speak not of her here; her name to me it is almost holy. Such a gracious, noble lady, full of compassion and pity for those who are sad and desolate. That you should dare to love her seems even a crime. Touch me not! Oh! touch me never more. What if she knew that you——"

The girl broke off, speechless, with a fixed stare of horror, regarding him. It was almost an excitement to him. This tragic scene, coming unexpectedly, awoke slumbering passion. The torrent of wild talk and fierce invective did not shock Captain Mallison's sensibilities at all. The unbridled excess of wrathful language struck his pulses agreeably. He had wearied greatly of Anne's passive yielding to his endearments, of her tacit acceptance of the love he feigned. Whether he came or went, she betrayed no womanly emotion; she never reproached him, never questioned him concerning any past, nor displayed the reasonable amount of jealousy natural to a young woman

who has drawn a matrimonial prize. For Harry certainly considered, though this marriage was expedient for him, that he gave as good as he got. In the midst of the monotonous dulness of his present life of propriety and dutiful conduct, this revival of love's fiercer emotions was welcome to him: it was an exhilarating interlude in a dull play.

"Dearest, but why need she know?" whispered the voice of this tempter.

"Ah, dear God!" she sighed vehemently, "how I did love you!" She looked at him intently. "No, no! she shall never know. Soon, very soon, before you take her away, I will go back to my country. I did not think it was in me to forgive; but she is good and innocent, and she shall not suffer by me. Yes, for her sake I will go. I will not speak of your falseness. And yet, oh God! it may be a cruelty to her. The time may come when you will tire of her, and seek yet another love. Marriage bonds do not chain inconstant hearts."

She turned her head swiftly; there was a sound of cracking in the brushwood behind her. The man and the girl had been absorbed in their own concerns. Some one else had appeared suddenly at the end of the opening, pausing only a moment, and then disappearing once more within the bushes.

"Some one comes," said Maria, breathlessly; "I must leave you. You must not speak to me or look at me ever any more."

Captain Mallison arrested her once more with a touch. A momentary passion made him reckless of consequences. But the footsteps were dying away in the distance.

"It is only a keeper," he said, coolly; "he knows better than to disturb a *tête-à-tête*." He smiled at his victim's anxious looks.

"What, little one, you would escape, would you? I swear you shall not leave me till you promise to meet me to-night. Do I not love you, adore you, still? You little, lovely fiend, you warm, fierce thing, I will tame you once more. Ah, no, my bird, you shall not fly away yet. What, not one kiss for the sake of old days?" He bent towards her, with the look of a conqueror on his face. It was not necessary to sue humbly here. In truth, he was tired of that *rôle*.

She held away, struggling with frenzied force to release herself.

"Let me go," she cried faintly, while the veins in her neck swelled. He laughed audibly, though softly, in his triumphant strength, as he drew her slowly into a closer embrace. "God of my life! oh, holy Jesus, have pity! Yes, I will promise if you let me go."

He freed her unwillingly.

Without moving, she went on speaking.

"Yes, yes, I will come as you do bid me. At the shrubbery gate at ten of the clock you will find me. I will be there without fail. But they shall be our last words."

She spoke slowly, as though it were a heavy labour to express herself.

"It is false to her, *es positivo*, it is deceiving her. But it may save by-and-by what is worse."

For a second she paused, and lifted her hand solemnly, pointing to the sky.

"Listen to me now. By the eternal God, I swear that if you touch me to-night with one finger, or draw near your false face to mine—I know no false oaths—that I will answer you back with a kiss so cruel, so cold" (she caught her breath), "that never, oh never in this world shall you ask of any woman another!"

The dangerous light in her eyes flickered and went out. She broke into a wild laugh, clapping her hands together like a child in sportive glee. There was something elfish in her looks, a crazy element in her sudden mirth. Her clear laugh penetrated the wood, ringing afar off in the ears of one who fled along a footpath, repeating, with delirious joy:

"I am free! I am free!"

Anne was absolved from faithfulness.

Maria ceased to laugh as suddenly as she broke out.

"I go now. To-night, at the hour fixed, I do meet you. Be true to my lady. Do not forget my vow. *Ahi!* it may be yet that you will choose to save the *Senorita* years of slow torture—heart-break, you do call it. Will you ask to taste of my cold and magic kiss? They do say it stills all heart hunger, and there is rest after it. *Ahi, ahi!* if I dared to try."

She waved her hand, and, without further warning of departure, sprang lightly away, disappearing along the path Captain Mallison had approached her by.



CHAPTER XVI.

As Anne retraced her steps in wild excitement, the confusion of her mind was great. Yet, above all disorder and astonishment, there reigned a supreme joy. Her whole bearing was transformed. She was another woman, buoyant with the birth of a new hope. Her step was light, her breath was free. The weight of a promise no longer oppressed her. She had now the right to cast the hateful shackles from her. She was not in honour bound to keep faith with one who was false.

The Judge, encountering his daughter as she entered the hall from without, remarked how well she looked. The queenly carriage of her head, the smile on her lips, the shining light in her eyes, could not escape his notice.

"You have enjoyed your walk, Anne. Ah, by-and-by you will make a happy *châtelaine*, I suppose, though it is not exactly the part I should have prophesied for you to play. High flights are not for you, after all. To live prose—here—that is your fate."

He smiled disagreeably. Anne looked at him only a second, and then she turned and rested her gaze upon the distant woods, upon which the sunset light gleamed. A grave look spread over her face.

"Yes, my walk has satisfied me. I have dropped a burden in the woods, never oh never to take it up again.

To-morrow I will come and speak to you about it. I do not think—nay, I know—I shall not live prose *here*."

To-morrow, Anne? Ah no, it will not be needful for you to speak on any to-morrow.

The Judge watched her across the wide hall and up the shallow staircase, with a frown on his face. Anne's demeanour left him uncertain, uncomfortable. Something had happened. Had she quarrelled with her cousin? Could she have the intention of casting him off? As he waited at the front door, Captain Mallison came sauntering out of the shrubbery. He was smoking, and had a pleasant smile upon his face.

Anne had gone straight upstairs to her room, proceeding at once to dress herself for dinner. She did not ring to summon Maria. That would have advertised the maid's absence to the household. The ornaments and dress Miss Mallison usually wore were laid out ready on the bed. Anne, robed in a white dressing gown, plaiting her hair laboriously, had a brilliant colour on her ordinarily pale face, and a singularly soft glistening in her eyes. It was something like the glitter of tears. Yet she did not look sad or angry. It seemed more like the softness and weakness following the birth of a new joy, that affected her so strangely. That this was a young woman about to discard a lover none would believe.

It was in no mechanical or careless way that she arrayed herself for the evening. She braided her hair elaborately, and took the trouble to look out another set of ornaments to harmonise better with her gown.

"Oh, John!" she whispered once, with a happy smile,

as she clasped a heavy gold necklet round her throat. Such an exquisitely soft sigh, hardly breathed upon. There was no disloyalty now, and Anne Mallison's thoughts went back to John Spencer.

It was a lover-like practice of Captain Mallison to give daily orders to the gardener to send in flowers for Anne's adornment. He was quite *au fait* at these little attentions. He was aware that his cousin had a partiality for yellow and golden blossoms. To-night, upon her dressing table, *Gloire de Dijon* roses from the greenhouse lay ready to her hand. She cast them aside, selecting in preference a bunch of primroses from a vase which she had herself filled yesterday.

When Maria came at her accustomed hour to her young lady's room she found her fully prepared to go downstairs. Anne did not lift her head or look at her. The maid's face was calm and collected, with no trace of emotion. Her manner was as quiet and subdued as usual. Nothing denoted that she had been out, or had passed through any excitement.

"I do not require you," said Anne, taking up her fan. The girl accepted the dismissal at once, not waiting to set the room in order. Some ten minutes later, when Miss Mallison descended the staircase, Maria peered over a higher landing, watching her descend.

"Oh, holy Virgin! I shall sacrifice her. She will marry him in blindness, not knowing at all," sighed the wretched girl, clasping her hands together in a paroxysm of despair.

Presently Captain Mallison came along the corridor, whistling an operatic air, after his custom. How hand-

some he looked, with the level rays of the smiling sun shining through the oriel window and glistening upon his golden curls! Those crisp, golden locks were well admired and beloved of women, though Harry vainly struggled to subdue their short twists. He was faultlessly symmetrical in the simplicity of evening dress. Just a moment he paused at the head of the staircase, regarding his well-trimmed nails as though they were not altogether satisfactory. Maria caught sight of his well-remembered signet ring. She crouched backwards from the bannisters above as he ran lightly down the stairs. Alas! he could not feel the angry gleam of tortured eyes, nor see the force of impotent passion raging above his head. He was in excellent spirits to-night. He even thought of a certain loving little fool with a degree of compassion. It was hard on the women, no doubt, that he was so fascinating. Her affection for him had actually induced the little thing to follow him to England. What a wild-goose chase, with no clue to his identity! Good Lord, what a strange thing chance was! How improbable that, not knowing his real name, she should ever have found him. After all, those had been pleasant days spent in that Spanish village. Certainly Maria was very pretty, very bewitching, with her sudden flamings, her angry retorts, her tempestuous moods. His courtship at present needed a spice of excitement.

What harm to renew a few passages of a bygone time—to open the pages of the past? The girl had loved him well; yet he had ridden away after the pleasant fooling. No one had been the wiser if her infatuation had not

betrayed her. Harry Mallison took no small credit to himself that his love-making had been of such an innocent nature. A few meetings in the orange groves by moonlight; a few kisses, sighs, vows. Good Heaven! how balmy the air was there, how sickly sweet the scent of flowers, how deep the shadows, how bright Maria's eyes! There was nothing so warm, or liquid, or melting in this cold land. What profound sighs, what fervent hand-clasps, what endearing epithets he remembered!

With such thoughts Harry passed into the presence of his betrothed. He looked at her, expecting to find her appearance and manners more distasteful than before. To his surprise, there was an unwonted animation about her. She condescended to be playful once or twice, and suffered the Squire's amenities with a good grace. Before dinner she did not touch the knitting which Captain Mallison so hated, but, standing on the hearth-rug, discoursed gaily on trivial topics. A rich colour lent life to her face, and she smiled freely. What a pity it was that Anne was not always so animated! thought Harry, as he looked at her with admiration; for this young man could find room for many admirations at once.

"Where are my roses, *carissima?*" he said, pointedly, as she touched his proffered arm with the tips of her fingers. As they passed into the dining-room, she answered, carelessly:

"They did not suit me to-night. Tell me—for you know all these things—they are emblems of secrecy, are they not?"

A look that he did not understand was on Anne's face.

He did not care to ask her meaning. She was an enigma not at all necessary to solve—only a vague feeling of discomfort disturbed him during dinner-time. What had she meant about secrecy? He was dimly conscious that there was something amiss.

After dinner that night, when Harry sauntered into the drawing-room, he carried an unlighted cigarette in his hand. He approached Anne. Would she come out with him on the terrace walk while he smoked? She had done so before occasionally on mild evenings. To-night she declined, remarking it was chilly. Turning to the Judge, she challenged him to *écarté*. Harry did not wait to watch the opening game, but, turning the handle of the French window, disappeared without. As the candles fluttered in the draught, Anne turned her head and looked after him. A vague uneasiness disturbed her. She saw that the night was very dark. She wished that he had spoken to her before he left. He might have said "Good-night" She would not see him again—no, perhaps never. Her face betrayed no anxiety, no emotion, though a sense of impending calamity stirred her, though a subtle excitement moved her pulses unduly. A dim presentiment of evil floated through her mind. All her efforts would not subdue the mysterious sensation of a dark curtain drawing round her. Anne was not of a temperament addicted to morbid ideas or dreams, but the moment the window closed on her cousin the cloud gathered. At last it seemed even to oppress her breathing. All the time her wits were preternaturally sharpened. It was as though she could see and hear doubly all that was within the

room, while the darkness and the vagueness outside deepened and thickened. The luck at play was all hers. She turned up the king repeatedly, and rose at length from the table a considerable winner.

"Pay me what thou owest," she said, with a feint of playfulness, as she held out her hand to her father. If she could only shake off this intolerable depression, this strange sense of blindness and deafness to any outer world!

The Judge laid two sovereigns on her upturned palm.

"All your lovers will forsake you, Anne. You are always too lucky at cards," he said, jesting. She bit her lip. Her eyebrows came down straight.

"Suppose you use past participles, father. Say rather *have forsaken.*" She pointed to the window where her cousin had gone out.

A little before ten o'clock Anne ceased all effort to talk. The cloud was gathering yet denser. Why did not Harry return to the drawing-room as he was wont to do? At last the girl laid her knitting aside and went upstairs to her room.

"I am not sociable to-night," she said, smiling faintly as she wished them all good-night.

"Where is Corydon?" said the Judge, with a scornful look in his eyes.

"Your ewe lamb needs no shepherding," answered back Anne readily.

When she had reached her room, she rang the bell sharply. After some delay, a housemaid came running along the corridor.

"Where is Maria? I want her," said Miss Mallison,

imperiously. The terrified rustic, an extra help called in by Mrs. Mallison during the week of her relatives' visit, twisted her apron and stared aghast at the magnificent young lady towering above her.

"If you please, Miss, I b'lieve as she's gone out, Miss. She didn't have no supper, and she ain't in her room, and her boots is gone. Shall I tell Mrs. Tucker, or is it anythink I can do for you, Miss?"

Abashed at her own temerity in proffering assistance to this haughty lady, she reddened up to her cap. Miss Mallison looked so stern and white that Bridget thanked Providence that her fate had not placed her in a high situation.

"No, no; don't trouble Mrs. Tucker, but send Maria here when she comes in. You can go."

Anne felt the air oppressive now. A fiery spot burned on either cheek; for repressed excitement and nervous tension were telling on her. She threw open her window, and rested her chin upon her hands, looking out into the night. She had extinguished the candles, and there was no fire. Out of doors it was very dark, and the soughing of a gusty wind stirred the tops of the evergreens beneath the window-sill. A dismal, fitful wind it was, waving at intervals the dense branches of yew and laurel. To her disordered fancy they seemed like funereal hearse-plumes in outline. Now and again the wind ceased entirely for a few seconds. One by one Anne saw the lights below put out, and heard the footsteps of her father and mother pass down the corridor. And still Maria had not come, and Anne did not disrobe herself.

At last she did discrown herself of her weight of hair: the heavy plaits oppressed her fevered brain. If she could only remove this intolerable sense of impotence which overwhelmed her! It was as though it behoved her to do something—she knew not what. When she removed the hair-pins, beautiful broad braids fell down her back.

At Dullingford the household kept early hours. The stable-clock had not clanged eleven, yet all the lights in the servants' wing, were extinguished. The only light that remained was the one in Harry's sanctum below. Anne's gaze was riveted upon it. His was a solitary room, built out at the end of a long glass passage, used as a conservatory. Originally this apartment, so cut off from the body of the house, had been a child's playroom, well out of the reach of sensitive elders, where discordant shrieks were immaterial. In latter years it had been fitted up as a sort of gun-room where Mrs. Mallison's sway was not felt. Smoking and late hours were congenial to Captain Mallison's sophisticated taste, and the room had been allotted to him as a harbour of refuge.

For more than an hour Anne sat quite still. Her brain was racked with bewildering thoughts. She knew she was glad of what she had seen that afternoon. But oh! it must be a sinful gladness which could welcome a lover's perfidy and look without horror and fear upon the possible disgrace of another. She herself was freed from the weight of a crushing and terrible responsibility, from the fear of an unloving marriage, but—but——

Alas! had she not seen Maria in the arms of her

own promised husband? The lips that had touched her face, her hands, had pressed burning kisses upon the features of another woman. And yet—yet, she could be glad! The story told itself without need of explanation. For Anne had been too far off, had come upon the guilty pair too suddenly, to hear a word of their speech. It was not necessary to hear, to perceive a tale of folly, if not of sin past, ay, perhaps present. How long had Maria held renewed intercourse with her former lover?—for Anne's quick intuition recognised that Captain Mallison was the man concerning whom Maria had spoken. The deep and fervent passion which had moved the Spanish girl in an hour of partial confidence had been no sudden growth, could never be effaced by a subsequent impression.

It was not anything like anger that stirred Anne's emotion. The duplicity of both towards herself did not affect her. The great joy of her release had for awhile blotted out the wrong-doing which gave her back her freedom. She thought only of how it affected her own life.

Yes, now she might end her engagement justly, without any unfairness towards Harry. But how and when would she do it? She would seek her father in the morning, and it must be left to him to account to all the members of the family for the sudden dismissal and the breaking of the contract. She pondered whether it would be necessary to tell Harry what she knew. Anne was too well aware that he had an easy way of slipping out of the consequences of his misdeeds. He would appeal, explain, and make much of tempation, leaving her feeble. He would address

himself to her honour, her pity, and use all the old weapons. Alas! they had lost their strength now. What necessity to go through such a painful scene? No; she would only quietly explain things to her father, and then go away from Dullingford. But she must see Maria before leaving. With the miserable victim there must be, there should be, some explanation. Anne did not shrink from knowing the extent of her guilt. She could not cast this reckless, passionate girl upon the world's cruelty and contempt without a hearing.

The flow of Anne's thoughts was suddenly checked. What was that thing flitting across the open expanse of lawn in front of Harry's window? The light from within that room shed a dim radiance on the turf for a few yards. It was something dark, of the shape of a human form, that moved swiftly towards the building, and finally disappeared in the blackness of shrubs near the smoking-room. Anne continued to look steadily for the reappearance of this apparition. A cold fear struck at her heart. It was Maria, without any doubt. After a few moments it again crossed the light of the window, hesitating a second as if about to enter there, but finally going round to the door in the glass passage. Anne watched, hardly breathing. Presently another appearance made itself expected. A red spark issued from the same quarter of the shrubbery as the former figure. Only this one did not scud across the open ground like a startled bird seeking to hide itself. On the contrary, it moved slowly, standing still every now and again, as if looking about for something. Had somebody escaped it?

A sudden gust of wind brought the odour of fragrant tobacco up to Anne's window. A long sob seemed to sigh through the tree-tops near to her. She leaned out in the darkness. She stretched out her hands to the empty air. An irresistible longing to cry out moved her. Should she lift a warning voice? To whom? Of what? Of the foolish presentiment that could take no form? This was an hysterical madness; a nervous delirium. She must, she would, conquer it. Harry was only returning leisurely from his evening ramble. Why should he seek anything at this hour of the night? Yet, how he lingered! She saw him toss the cigar away. She saw him stand in the light of the window, with his back to it. Then he raised his head and looked upwards, as though seeking for the stars that were not. A dull, dark curtain hid all heavenly light. The weight of a pall seemed over the earth, the voices of mourning spirits in the air. At last he turned. There was a slight difficulty with the handle which opened the window, before he disappeared within. Anne, paralysed with a sick horror, not knowing any wherefore, watched dumbly. He had not closed the window after him, for she could see the white blind flapping gently to and fro in the draught. Her eyes were riveted as by a mesmeric influence. Would he come out again? Once she saw his shadow pass the window. He had been out this evening with Maria, of course. Oh, shame! shame! A sudden overmastering emotion conquered her fear. For a few seconds she covered her face, sobbing hard, dry sobs.

Anne realised now fully that she had abased herself in

vain for the sake of one who did not love her. She had aspired to be another's keeper. In the arrogance of her spirit she had claimed a moral superiority. What a poor dignity and honour had been hers! The sacrifice was robbed of all merit. She had been secretly mocked and derided by one she had aimed to redeem. Everything had been in vain. Now she would be free, ay, at once! The order of release should come without delay, without a second of waiting. He could urge no plea of excuse if taken unawares. She stood up in the darkness. A cold blast of air blew upon her, fluttering the laces at her throat, and then suddenly died away. Far off at the kennels a dog bayed. Another sound more awful. Her heart stood still. The presentiment was shaped clearly.

It was a shot she heard.

She leaned from the window at the report, clinging desperately to the sill.

She waited, listening again, watching intently. Harry must have come out once more without her perceiving him. What mad folly of hers! He had fired at a bat, or an owl, of course. There were pistols and guns in any number in that room, and he loved to slay harmless, innocent things. Anne thought of that—he never spared anything. Mrs. Mallison had said he had more than once alarmed her at night by this idle sport. He was cruel—yes, she was sure of it now; but was he capable of any black crime? Why should he harm Maria? Why, ah, why, Anne, did you think it possible he might? She would go down and see him, speak to him, tell him face to face, instead of writing or acting by deputy, that she knew him

to be false as well as weak. She would not lose a moment: her resolution might fail her yet. She felt her way to the dressing-table, and struck a light quickly. The sombre gloom of the surroundings seemed more oppressive than at any former time. Her door creaked as she opened it, but the house was wrapped in profound silence. Her step resounded in the stillness, but she moved down the staircase boldly, not halting at a creaking board, or listening tremulously for the opening of doors. Anne was in heroic mood. Her candlestick was steady in her hand. The light revealed clearly her well-cut features, with a rigid, solemn look upon them.

In the long glass passage leading to Harry's room many flowers were nursed. In years to come, Anne always turned faint at the odour of hyacinths and the sight of tulips. Why was everything red that met her gaze to-night? There were scarlet geraniums and crimson tulips, variegated tulips, yellow, splashed and streaked with red marks that looked like blood. Golden heads with gory stains all about her! The tiles at her feet were so red too. Ah! how cold they were!

The door admitting from the glass passage to Harry's sanctum was closed. Anne appeared to have no notion that this intrusion in bachelor quarters in the dead of night could hereafter be laid to her charge. She knocked with rapidly repeated taps, receiving no answer. She turned the door-handle, and paused on the threshold. To her utter amazement, the room was in darkness. When she had left her own chamber there had been a light here. The window stood open, the blind blowing backwards and

forwards. She closed the door hastily behind her, for her candle flared and was threatened with extinction in the current of air. Harry had gone out again, no doubt. Could he have heard her approach, and have sought to avoid an interview? That did not seem likely. Yet it was strange that he had extinguished the candles. She would wait. He would certainly come back, having left the window open. A single revolver, with a gun-stock lying on the table, seemed to intimate that he had been examining or cleaning his weapons. The case in which a pair of revolvers had been locked away lay open also on the table. An evening paper was tossed on the floor; a straw hat lay on the sofa, where the cushion was dented by the pressure of his head. Harry's silver cigar-case gleamed on the mantel-shelf. A dozen traces of his presence were presented to her notice. As Anne advanced to set down her candle, her foot struck against some hard object. The carpet was a dark one, and she did not at once perceive the nature of the obstacle. Stooping, she saw it was a revolver fallen on the floor, probably the companion of the one on the table. She had a womanish dread of fire-arms, and forebore to take it up. The room had a desolate look, as though deserted.

A moment Anne stood still, looking about her. Her heart was beating in a suffocating way, but her lips were set firmly. What cause was there for fear? She shivered. There seemed to be an icy atmosphere in this room. How long would she have to wait here? Surely he would not remain out much later. She glanced at the clock. Ten minutes to twelve. Then her eye fell on the fire.

Some one had heaped on fresh coals when it was almost extinct, for it smouldered in a dull way.

The table, standing in the centre of the room, on which the weapons lay was a large one with drawers in it. It was a solid, substantial piece of furniture, not to be seen under. Anne, having deposited her candle as far from the revolver as possible, passed round the table to reach the window. Suddenly she drew back, and put out both hands before her. The candle gave but a feeble light, and the shadows were obscure, yet there could be no mistake about the thing she saw.

"Oh, God!" she cried, "who is it?"

In a heap, crouched upon the floor behind the table, lay a body. Though tumbled together, in a shapeless mass of dark clothes, she knew instinctively it was a body. With an awful horror of certainty on her rigid features, her lips bloodless and parted now, her tongue cleaving to her mouth, Anne drew nearer, still nearer, bending fearfully over the formless thing which did not move. It heard not her presence, stirred not at her close approach. Her gasping breath fanned it, while, without consciousness, her hands held her skirts away from contact with the prostrate form.

"Maria—speak!" she said, in hoarse agony, to the still, black heap.

Flap, flap, went the blind in answer. The candle on the table flickering, caused Anne's shadow to move upon the wall. There was an air of intense reality about these things. This was no dream of violence. Anne's face, blanched by a horrible fear, almost touched the body.

The hands and feet seemed doubled under it where it had fallen. Nothing but black clothes, whose texture she dared not feel. As she bowed herself, one of her long, loose plaits fell forward over her shoulder and touched the ground. Anne drew it back, and it was wet. A low shriek broke from her at the clammy touch. She looked at her hand, and there was blood upon it. Desperately she laid both arms about the inert mass. Lifting it, she turned it round, staggering beneath a burden which was heavy. What was this? What ghastly, unexpected revelation confronted her? Oh, terrible retribution! Oh, fulfilment of presentiment little understood! She did not speak, or sob, or shriek, but, kneeling down silently beside the lifeless form, she raised the dead man's head upon her knee. It was Harry. She tore at the shirt-studs, opened his vest, and felt for the heart-throbs which were not. No pulsation rose beneath her hand. Stagnant was the life-current; never more would the vital essence flow. Dead, quite dead, though warm and yielding. The blue eyes which had gazed with their false frankness at Anne a few hours ago across the dinner-table were but half shut, though glazed with a dull unconsciousness. He had been into the conservatory since Anne had seen him last, for there was a sprig of orange blossom in his button-hole, and a bit of the same crushed in his right hand.

His lips were wounded grievously, and his yellow curls dabbled with blood. Anne did not observe the ghastly hurt at the crown of his head as she hung over the dead man's face. It appeared as if the shot

had hit him on the mouth, aimed so as to shatter the skull.

Verily the order of release had come for Anne Mallison, though not from her own lips. Harry Mallison had gone to answer for his sins before another tribunal.

ASTRÆA.

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PART III.



CHAPTER XVII.

THOUGH it was July, sultry summer weather had come unexpectedly. A week of heavy rain had been succeeded by close, stifling days, when the sun blazed hotly, and not a breath of languid air stirred the trees. Chronic grumblers railed against climatic uncertainties.

During these suffocating days a multitude of local magnates were gathered together in an assize town in the east of England, to celebrate the confusion of crime. To the majority, the proceedings which called them hither were pleasing, rather than otherwise, offering an agreeable stimulant to their slumbering intelligences. Moreover, the importance of the magisterial office was made manifest at this period.

There was an agreeable stir about the streets of Lipswich which ministered pleasantly to those minds which were diseased with rural stagnation. Nevertheless, these officers of the law felt it incumbent on them to curse heat and flies, and to rail at the insufficient supply of ice, as well as at the inferior provisions supplied by country hotels, while they made much of the duties of justice.

The public mind had, however, relieved itself of the burden of lesser offences, such as a bank robbery, a couple of assaults, and a case of manslaughter. The last, and most serious, charge would be made to-day. Early on

this oppressive morning there was the hush of suppressed excitement over the court of justice. An extraordinary degree of interest in the trial to come off was manifested in closely packed benches and eager faces. A crowd of respectable people had besieged the doors for an hour before the time of admittance.

A young girl was to be tried for her life to-day—for the murder of her false lover, report said.

The whole county of Flatshire concerned itself in this matter, which was connected with one of its well-known families. It is true that the Mallisons did not reside in the immediate neighbourhood of Lipswich, but still their name was honoured and recognised here. Judge Mallison, the brother of the Flatshire Squire, had sat too often on the judicial bench in this town for it to be easily forgotten.

The scandal in connection with this trial was indubitable, and the great folks of the vicinity felt a sort of complacency in their acquaintance with the subjects of it. It was currently reported that shocking disclosures would further startle the public. The whisper of immorality set the neighbourhood on the *qui vive*. Hints of impropriety stretched the ear even of aristocracy. Yet the crime was invested with a halo of romance which set it apart from every-day sin. The murdered man had been a popular member of society, who had footed it gaily at many a county ball in this very town. Revelations concerning his private life would naturally be of interest to those he had danced with, smiled at, ay, perchance, spoken soft words to.

It was a three-volume novel, condensed, and none of the

ladies of the district were of a mind to forego the exhilarating spectacle of a girl murderess. No sensational play could be equal to that scene in court. So, gaily donning plumes and flowers, carrying scent-bottles and fans, they went forth to look upon the agony of a life-struggle. A singular fate had determined that the Judge who was to hear this cause should be the murdered man's uncle. In the annals of crime this might never occur again. In his judicial capacity would he be absolutely impartial, or would the recollection of his own blood calling for vengeance influence him? Many curious eyes were likely to scrutinise his conduct. Certainly the affair made a great stir in a world beyond Lipswich. Society papers reaped a golden harvest, replete with the scum and sediment of an individual family life. The curtain that hid the sins of the Mallisons was rung up again and again.

It was not likely that the case would be a prolonged one. The verdict could not be doubted. The evidence against the prisoner was damning, and it was said that she made no denial of guilt. Her counsel could only extenuate circumstances by pleading her youth and the cruelty of her lover. There was some uncertainty as to this. The extent of his misdeeds was not known. Had he only sported with her affections, or had he betrayed her trust? No one knew whether darker wrong surrounded the crime. It seemed improbable that a wanton fooling could deserve the extreme penalty of death at her hands. Dames of good report, and some of high degree, fluttered their fans, nodding significantly to each other, or whispering mysteriously the latest *on dit* circulating. It was certain that

the girl was foreign, Spanish or Italian, it was said, and of a violent, uncontrolled temper. How had she come to be in Miss Mallison's service? Had the love-making and treachery gone on for long under the proud beauty's eyes? For it was known, of course, that Miss Mallison had been engaged to her cousin, the murdered man.

To Maria Garcia the day of her trial was welcome. With the first ray of daylight she rose from her sleepless couch. Let the end come quickly. She was not afraid. Oh, no! Only the dull waiting, the time for thinking, the long hours of retrospect in her prison life were drawing to a close. Soon it would all be over, and the suspense of living would end. She felt sure that she would be condemned—yes, even that they would hang her. A shameful death. What matter? She did not shudder before the thought of such a doom. Death would come sooner or later, and life now was worth nothing to her. In that one delirious hour she had died a thousand times. No priest visited her. She had made no confession, received no absolution. Stolid and sullen, often with a vacant expression on her face, she would sit for hours looking out of her window, hardly answering the warders who spoke to her. She was wan and haggard, but not with remorse. Hers was a mere bodily weakness that numbed her perceptions. The deathly pallor of her face was like that of one who had long lived in darkness.

Like a sleep-walker she was led forward into court and placed in the dock. The outward things about her hardly seemed apparent to her vacant gaze. She remained where she was placed, leaning tranquilly against the iron bar

before her, insensible to its coldness. She became at length conscious that many people were looking at her. Her eyes woke to life in a startled way, and she glanced about her with a sort of childish timidity. Suddenly her small hands gripped the bar. Where was she? How strange it all looked! How many men there were here, and they all had curly grey hair! How sternly they looked at her! Very few had kind faces, and those compassionate ones did not stare at her. Maria drooped perceptibly, and seemed to shrink down at the turning of many heads. Yet her large eyes travelled on over the sea of faces towards the higher benches.

She started when she perceived that there were women—ladies—there. Could it possibly be that *her* lady was amongst them? These women, reckoned refined and tender-hearted in the society where they moved, who shuddered at the sight of physical pain, who decried vivisection, who were devout church-goers and prayer-makers, who preached virtuously to young daughters, whose price was above rubies probably, according to the world's verdict, looked hardly and coldly at the wretched prisoner. They noticed the wild and startled gaze directed towards them with wonder and curiosity, without pity or sorrow. They might have counted her heart-throbs had they been near enough, but they only turned to each other to make idle comments on her frail appearance, her timid demeanour. Certainly there was no vacancy in Maria's expression now. The black circles round her eyes seemed to show up the flames that had been relighted. These gleams of light never faded throughout the day. The

forms of the court went on unmarked by her. When the question, Guilty or not guilty, was put to her, she made no reply. She was absorbed in the spectators; the players were nothing to her Her lips remained parted, like the double petal of a crimson tropical flower, as she breathed. She searched the benches from end to end with questioning eyes upon each veiled lady. No; Anne was not there. She sighed, relieved, and dropped her eyes upon the jury. How they stared at her! Could they see her crime on her face? Would they measure the strength of her hands?

There was one man amongst the wigged gentlemen below the dock who again and again turned a look of anxiety in the direction of the Judge. Throughout the assize the chief officer of the law had been variable and strange. To-day his uncertainty and weakness seemed to have culminated. He was restless in his chair, his hands were never still, his eyes unsteady and bloodshot. He had the appearance of a man who had been drinking, or was utterly unnerved through fear or illness. It was whispered about the court that Sir Edward Mallison was breaking down. The bright sun, streaming through a skylight window on his robes and wig, seemed to mock the majestic insignia of justice by bringing out more clearly his flinching regard, his undetermined movements. The brevity of address and decision of voice which were wont to characterise Judge Mallison were not remarked this summer. During the previous days' trials he had been observed to hesitate in his speech, and apparently had a difficulty at times in concentrating his attention upon the matter before him. To-day there were some in

court who felt pity for his office. It was surely a hard thing to sit in judgment on the guilty one whose hands were stained with the blood of his kindred. It was known only by a few that he might have escaped the task of the trial set before him. But he had been resolved to fulfil his duty, to sit on the circuit whereunto he was called. Pretexts were all but offered to him by brother judges, but in vain. He would not proffer a plea of ill-health under such circumstances. He was quite well and competent to sit on the bench. Not a few commended this stoic conduct.

Some surprise was caused in Lipswich when it became known that Mr. Spencer would defend the friendless, penniless sinner. He was known to be a close friend of the family. How could he undertake such a cause, and preserve amicable relations? Beyond this, the fact of a much-engaged barrister undertaking a defence without special retainer was certainly unorthodox. And John Spencer in legal circles had never acquired the stigma of Quixotism.

Probably a great many virtuous and right-minded people might have been scandalised had they seen a little note in Anne Mallison's handwriting, addressed to the popular pleader:

"For my sake, defend Maria Garcia. Her life must be saved at any price."

Anne's fears went beyond all probabilities. She made sure that they would hang even a woman convicted of deliberate, if not premeditated, murder. So John, without sending any reply to Anne, had undertaken

to plead the cause of the wretched criminal. There was no question of a fee here.

When the trial was fairly opened, Maria leaned slightly forward and appeared to be endeavouring to follow the proceedings. The multitude about her no longer concerned her mind. Her lady was not there. What were all these strangers to her? This crowd came, of course, to look on her anguish, to glory in her disgrace. Well, they should not see it. No sign should show she suffered. What mattered it all now? She had lived her life—her little day was done. Never would bliss, like in those few short weeks at Seville, come to her again. Ah! but she knew now for certain that never any more would that faithless one touch a woman's lips. Oh! strange consolation to one in so extreme a case! Yes, indeed, his last breath had pronounced her name, his last touch had wrested the bridal flower from her hair. If—if only the *Senorita* had not loved him. It might have broken her heart. One so proud, so pure, would never reveal the love she felt.

Never in her prison solitude had actual remorse for the desperate deed visited the Spanish girl. *He* slept well. *He* had never suffered. *He* had kissed her, and the revolver had touched his lips, and all was over. No delirious recollection of blood and wounds, no sick, shuddering fear of the future, visited her in the night watches. Her only suffering was for Anne; the sole remorse that overcame her was the thought of kindness cruelly returned. The young mistress who had pitied her, who had been patient towards her offences, who had

shown a deep sympathy with her loneliness, who had helped her in distress, who had condoned her violent moods, had seemed to be betrayed by her.

How would the *Senori'a* ever know that she had not been treacherous? She had known what it was herself to suffer the pangs of slighted love, the desolation of life solitary and bereft of hope. What if Miss Mallison suffered now in a like measure? Anne's calm face haunted Maria waking and sleeping. Only it was Anne's face with a stern, hard look, reproachful, unforgiving, drawing herself away from a murderess.

How clearly she recalled every incident of that night —that night of woe! Ah, yes, that night when he had kissed her once more, and she too had kissed him. Then afterwards—when it was all over—the sight of Anne, tall and white, like a retributive angel, coming to the open window and gazing out into the darkness, gazing at last upon a crouching figure outside, that waited for the wrath and judgment to come. At the bidding of those compelling eyes she had straightway risen up from the ground, and had once again entered the room where the victim lay stiffening. It was Anne who had accused her, who had delivered her over to death. But that was nothing. She had never wished to escape. What was life worth to her?

But if, when it was all over, and her fate was spoken—if only her young lady would touch her hand, would bend near to her and whisper, "I did not love him," then death would be even joy. *His* avenging spirit might meet her at purgatory's gates; *his* voice might send her to

the lowest, darkest hell to expiate her guilt; but, with Anne's assurance, what would it matter? Then in no world to come would there be life everlasting for these twain together. Thus her passionate jealousy went beyond the grave.

But she remembered that Anne had looked at the dead man tenderly, had chafed his hands, and had wiped the blood-stains from his lips, whispering, "Harry, speak to me," with a passionate longing.

Suddenly the wretched sinner, with a flood of recollection sweeping over her, raised her eyes to the Judge's face. At the same instant he looked at her—a strangely solemn look, as at one risen from the dead. Each recalled another face in that long glance. To Maria, every lineament of Sir Edward's face reflected his daughter. Anne, with ashy face and lowered brows, had been his very counterpart. To the Judge, the expression of one long at rest looked out of this prisoner's eyes.

Then for a moment Mr. Spencer stood up to stretch across the table. Maria recognised him. He had come to see her twice in the prison, strange to say, though he was Miss Mallison's friend. He had told her that he would undertake her defence. He must have thought her ungrateful when he had tried to talk to her. His voice and manner had been kind, but yet she had responded sullenly, and with resistance to inquiry. What was there to say? She did not wish him to speak for her. To tell lies to try and save her could do no good. It was wicked to tell lies, she said. And she a murderess!

If she spoke to him or unburdened herself at all, he

might find out many things. She would not disgrace the family at home. They would never know; they would think she was dead, for she had never written to her friends. And this gentleman had asked her many questions about her people—her father—her mother. Had she no wish to see anyone, to send for some relative in this extreme hour of peril? He had been very persistent about her mother, who was dead so many years since, so long that she had almost forgotten her. All the time, she had the little medallion picture of her hidden near her breast, but that she would not show. They would take it from her some day soon, but meanwhile no strange eyes should look on it. Of her father he had also questioned closely; and of him truly she could declare she knew nothing. She had heard that he had come from over the sea, and that he had gone away once in a ship, and never returned. He had been drowned, most likely. She had been born close by the sea herself. It was when she was a little baby that the good cousin Manuel Garcia had taken both mother and child to his comfortable home, sheltering them there, finally marrying the mother and adopting the child as his own. The slur of bastard birth Maria knew naught of.

"He is getting an old man now, the good cousin Manuel. He loved me well, and called me by his name, and I left him. It was a great cruelty. Perhaps he is dead of sorrow, and he too will meet me at the doors of hell to burn my soul with fiercer fires," were words that Maria spoke to Mr. Spencer when he came to visit

her. She had a calm conviction of her terrible doom hereafter, which she endured with the fortitude of despair. There was no hope for her, and the awful weight of woe crushed and subdued her to passive acquiescence.

"Think not that I am of a family base-born. The Garcias were ever people well to do and honest. I have served others now, and it does not matter my birth. My father, it may be, was noble even. Do I bear the marks of poor blood?" she had said, more defiantly, when Mr. Spencer had pressed questions home concerning her antecedents.

When the prosecuting counsel rose up to open the case, Maria looked at him with a feeble curiosity, wondering what he could have to say that was not already known. All these forms seemed void and empty to her. They knew quite well she was guilty. What necessity for any argument about it?

Mr. Brownwigg, Q.C., having a good voice and pompous delivery, Maria was able to follow his speech without difficulty. He gave a clear narrative of events on the evening of the murder. The dead man had left the drawing-room immediately after dinner, and had not been seen alive by any of his family afterwards. Finally, Mr. Brownwigg concluded with Anne's hearing of the pistol-shot, and descent to her cousin's room. The chief burden of evidence would rest on Miss Mallison, who would no doubt satisfy the gentlemen of the jury that the prisoner had committed the crime with which she was charged. The maid had been taken red-handed, blood-stains upon

her dress, orange-blossom in her hair, and the revolver on the floor, where she had probably thrown it when she fled. One of the servants of the Mallison household would give evidence that she had seen the prisoner in the shrubbery with the murdered man between nine and ten o'clock, the last time he had been seen alive by anyone. It would be beyond his province to relate antecedent circumstances, or supply a reason for this terrible crime. Love scorned was apt to turn to hate, and jealousy and revenge were perilous passions to play with. It would be unnecessary to prolong this painful case by calling many witnesses to testify to the prisoner's violent disposition. Hers was a wild and vindictive nature, and, young as she was, could hardly be said to be subject to sudden impulses. It could scarcely be doubted that this foul deed was premeditated.

Those who looked at Maria noticed something, that faintly shadowed a smile, to pass over her face.

Mr. Brownwigg, after an emphatic pause, went on in a yet slower and more dignified way. It would be his painful duty to put leading questions to a young lady who had already suffered much mental distress and anxiety. Under the circumstances, she naturally felt her position acutely. He trusted that she might be spared any unnecessary details or questions not bearing direct evidence on the crime. The pompous speaker glanced with meaning at Mr. Spencer, towards whom he cherished a private animosity. Mr. Brownwigg had never been famous for excess of tact. As he paused and sat down, whispering to a colleague, Miss Mallison's name was promptly called.

There was a rapid exchange of looks on the ladies'

benches, an agitation amidst the densely-packed mob in the rear, and a loud remonstrance, as, successively, anxious individuals stood up to gain a glimpse of the door. Finally, a dead silence, as the hush of expectation spread. A whispered "She is coming!" The door opened, and Anne Mallison advanced rapidly, with a firm tread. She glanced interrogatively at an usher, and, obeying a sign of his hand, found herself facing the court, in the witness-box.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THOSE who were personally acquainted with Miss Mallison —and there were many present who called themselves her friends—looked eagerly for her appearance. Since the crime had been committed, she had not been seen by any of them. Speculations were made freely. The shame of a public outrage, the certainty that she had been slighted and betrayed by her lover, were matters enough to lower a head less proud. How would she bear it all? Her cousin and lover had been ruthlessly shot within a few weeks of marriage. Her evidence would go far to convict the girl he had preferred before her, of the crime. The law compelled her presence: there was no escape for her from this torture. Would she appear weeping and ashamed, with a woman's terror of publicity? Or would she smile cynically in the face of misfortune and jealousy and death? The prisoner was observed to turn round at the rustle of a silken skirt against the boarding. A shudder passed over her wasted frame as she looked on Anne approaching. Every eye was turned on the coming witness. Miss Mallison advanced quickly, but with her head carried high. There was no abatement of her stately dignity or her self-possession. Maria cowered down till almost hidden by the barrier of the dock, yet watching intently every movement and expression of her former mistress. Anne never looked

that way. Having been sworn, she turned her face steadfastly to the counsel questioning her. She had never been inside a law court before, but the procedure was familiar to her. She knew instinctively the place of every officer of the law; knew, too, the exact spot where the crouching, terrified sinner stood. To-day Anne wore a hat which concealed the upper part of her face. The brim cast a shadow over her beautiful eyes, seeming to deepen their melancholy. Her lips had no tender curves now, but closed tightly a thin red line. There were no dimples in her cheeks when her lips parted to speak, and she appeared thinner and older. She was hardly handsome any longer. Without tripping or apparent hesitation, she answered the questions put to her. In substance, her replies were the same as when she made her deposition at the inquest. She had no doubt as to the doer of the deed, hardly seeming to have any compassion for the wretched girl. Some youthful, soft-hearted barristers, who were strangers to her, condemned Miss Mallison as a cruelly hard woman. "She would like to hang the girl," they said. There was no womanly pity or softness about her. Mr. Brownwigg might have dispensed with his appeal. Here were emotions below or above the power of any outsider to touch. Every answer was convincing evidence of the maid's guilt. "What need have we of any further witness?" was the sentiment of the court. Only once Anne was observed to lose her composure.

"You were sitting at your open window, between the hours of eleven and twelve, when you were startled by a shot, a sound which induced you to go downstairs again?"

Mr. Brownwigg made the question more as a statement than as if expecting an answer. On her previous examination before the coroner, Anne had volunteered the main facts of her evidence. She had not been subjected to this actual question. Now for a moment she hesitated. Her eyes wandered round the court till they found John Spencer. They rested on him as if for support in a trying moment. It was hard to speak the truth.

"No," she said, firmly, "I had intended to go down to my cousin before I heard anything."

A wave of colour rose to her pale face as she perceived, without looking, that the ladies on the benches stirred, turning their heads to exchange glances. This vague rustling, the unseen movements, were her condemnation. The women who smiled covertly behind their fans, who toyed with lorgnettes, or sniffed their salts with an air of indifference, listened intently for further revelations. After all, Miss Mallison was neither so cold nor so chaste as she appeared to be. The immaculate scorn with which she regarded flirting virgins and trifling matrons was only assumed. Why had she sought an interview with Captain Mallison in the dead of night, when the household had gone to rest? A pretty state of affairs indeed for one who derided the pleasures of love-making!

The prosecuting counsel appeared slightly disconcerted by the witness's admission. It was uncalled for, and he was not prepared for it.

"But you were on excellent terms with Captain Mallison. Your wedding-day was fixed," he said, quickly.

"We were on good terms—as far as he knew." With

an evident effort, Anne continued: "but I was going that night to his room to break off my engagement."

A fluttering sensation over all. From the dock there came a low cry. Anne heard it. She turned and looked at Maria for the first time. To all the spectators of this life-drama the long look exchanged between the two girls who had erewhile been close companions was as nothing. It was only a casual and natural turning of Miss Mallison's head at a sound from the prisoner.

It had not been a necessary admission made by Anne, or one bearing directly on the facts of the case. Only it seemed to herself that this public confession of her changed mind towards the dead man was demanded of her. It might help to right something that was wrong. She would forbid any to regard him in the light of an innocent martyr. She could not openly accuse the victim, or tell out to the whole world that she had known him false before his death. But she made it felt in a subtle way that he had proved himself unworthy in her eyes before that desperate deed had taken place. She risked the sneers and evil hints of all the people gathered here to feast on scandal, by confessing that she had been coming down from her chamber to the dead man's solitary room. But there were those present who should know, and who would believe, what she had stated.

At last Mr. Spencer straightened his wig, and rose to cross-examine.

Anne clasped her hands on the wooden rest before her. They were ungloved, and, as they rested on the Bible, Maria could see how the rings glittered. For Anne's

hands trembled, though her fingers were tightly interlaced.

"The prisoner entered your service in December last?"

"Yes."

"Had you a personal character from her former mistress?"

"No; only a written one."

"Did any intimation indicate that she had a violent or ungoverned temper?"

Anne looked intently at Maria's counsel, as though not perceiving any drift in his demands. But John Spencer looked back at her without any answering meaning.

"Mrs. Dawson, the lady with whom she lived at Gibraltar, gave her an excellent character. Her only fault was that she was disposed to brooding and melancholy fits."

Mr. Spencer, with his head thrown back resolutely, and his wig partially fallen off, questioned Miss Mallison with stern insistence. Her individuality seemed for the time forgotten. His genial smiles had all melted away. It was difficult to recognise the John Spencer of every-day life. He seemed in terrible earnest.

"Do you know anything of her relatives, or antecedent history?"

Anne shook her head sadly. "Only what she herself told me."

"Did her behaviour at any time during her service with you incline you to suppose that she was eccentric—hardly reasonable in some matters; that even she might be, or have been, deranged—*insane?*" Understanding dawned

in Anne's wide eyes. Her eyebrows knitted, her lips unclosed. There seemed a greater willingness in her responses. When she spoke it was more quickly and without deliberation.

"She was usually obedient to me, but she often did strange things; occasionally she broke into violent fits of grief or anger without giving a clue to the cause."

Mr. Spencer righted his wig in a mechanical way. He went on, in the same urgent tone:

"Can you relate any special incident to prove her peculiar behaviour?"

Anne rallied all her wits, her doubts at John's compulsion. He knew what he was about.

"She more than once threw letters belonging to me—letters I had received—into the fire." In her desperate effort to respond to John's bidding, Anne forgot momentarily who had written those letters. "She was not aware that I saw her do it," added Anne quickly; "they were not of any importance." But she had committed herself too far now.

"They were Captain Mallison's letters?"

"Yes." Anne's voice was very low.

"Have you any valid reason now to suppose that Captain Mallison was acquainted with your maid before she entered your service?"

The witness looked with wonder towards the prisoner's counsel. Could John Spencer really suppose that this terrible catastrophe had been worked up to only within a week of her cousin's death? Did he suppose that Maria's intimacy with Captain Mallison had begun at Dullingford?

"Yes, every reason," she said, painfully, casting down her eyes as if in shame. Her colour rose slowly.

"Would you kindly repeat the prisoner's words to you when taken in charge by the butler, at your bidding?"

Anne's lips parted twice. She trembled visibly. Her words came slowly, as though she weighed the significance of this speech. It had not affected the coroner's jury.

"She said: '*He* was a traitor to me, and to you. To you he will never be false any more. The cold kiss of death was mine. I did mean to kill myself as well, that together we might travel into the world of fires. Only I did see the vision of my mother'—and she wept."

There was utter stillness in the court. Miss Mallison had gained resolution as she proceeded, and her words were distinct to all. She paused a moment. In that impressive hush every eye was directed upon her. She went on: "'They will perhaps tell you that I was mad once in Spain, but it is not so now.'"

The girl in the dock leaned forward to gather every syllable of her own repeated words. "*Ahi! ahi!*" she muttered, faintly.

"She said *mad*, you are sure?"

"Yes, quite sure—the word was 'mad.'"

Then Mr. Spencer, pushing back his wig once more, sat down, and Anne knew her cross-examination was over. The line of defence that would be set up was now clear to all.

Miss Mallison made her way rapidly out of the crowded court, returning at once to her lodgings in the town—for

she remained at Lipswich with her father during the trial. Mr. Spencer had intimated to Anne that this Assize would put a severe strain on the Judge, and that it would be well if she could manage to spend a night or two near him.

Beneath the heavy trouble that had visited her family Anne showed a submissive spirit towards all advice. She had come down from town the preceding day; and had taken up her quarters in the quiet house where the Judge lodged.

Mr. Spencer and Miss Mallison had met but few times since the murder. They seemed to have little to say to each other on such occasions as they were brought together. There was something almost formal and distant in the barrister's manner towards the Judge's daughter at this epoch.

After the terrible night at Dullingford, Anne had been seriously ill, and doctors had ordered the strictest seclusion. She broke down utterly at the inquest, and had been carried off by the Turnovers to Bournemouth, out of sight and recollection of all that was familiar to her or might recall the terrible shock she had received. Aunt Hepzibah had ministered kindly to the stricken girl, without ostentatious sympathy. In those quiet weeks Anne learnt to regard her Dutch-doll cousins in a more kindly way, and to realise that behind their wooden deportment warm hearts throbbed. As she rallied from the blow, her fears and pity for the guilty one were quickened. It was hopeless to deny her guilt, but every extenuating circumstance must be made the most of. Anne had a strange

fear that they might hang Maria. The subject was never broached by her to any of her belongings; but, as the trial drew nearer, she suffered an agony of terror lest the doom of death might be spoken. It might be proved a premeditated deed, and Maria made to appear a female fiend. Anne's irrational trepidations augmented daily. It was strange that pity for the murderess should move her, but she could not dismiss from her mind the sight of that abject, dazed-looking figure which had so quietly owned its guilt.

There was yet another awful fear at work in her mind.

When the lunch hour came, on the day of the trial, the evidence against the prisoner was complete. The housemaid Bridget had been called. She, terrified at Anne's imperative mien, had, after the summons for the missing maid, gone in quest of her. She had caught sight of her in the shrubberies with the young master, and had heard her angry, passionate voice upbraiding in a foreign tongue. She had fled back to the house, not daring to deliver Miss Mallison's reproof. The butler of the Dullingford household was also called to repeat the words uttered by Maria on being taken into custody. She had made no resistance, he said, merely repeating, "I did it. Take me away." There had been blood-stains on her sleeve, and her hair was disordered, orange-blossom falling from it.

As all the officers of the law concerned in the trial retired for mid-day refreshment, the Judge was observed to walk slowly, and as if in pain. His tall figure was bowed, as if he found the weight of his robes too heavy to bear.

Mr. Spencer was one of the first to hurry out of the stifling court. He took no thought for lunch, but, jumping into an empty cab, drove away to the Mallisons' lodgings in hot haste. He met Anne downstairs within the little passage. Apparently she waited for his appearance. Speaking hoarsely, without looking at him, she said:

"He has come! I have spoken to him. My letter found him just in time. Oh, John, there is more trouble. This is terrible!"

There was no time to ask her what was terrible. He ran up the stairs without pausing.

When Mr. Spencer returned in the cab to the court a few seconds before it reopened, he had with him a companion, a dark-eyed, bronzed man, well advanced in years. Him, he led to the waiting-room for witnesses. As the defending counsel came forward to his place, hot and dusty, there was a brighter look about him. He replaced his wig with decision, and stood up in haste. Briefly he opened his case for the prisoner.

It was vain, in the face of such conclusive evidence, to deny the prisoner's guilt. As the gentlemen of the jury had been informed, the girl herself had admitted the crime at once, even exulting, in a delirious way, over her accomplishment of the heinous deed. Her words had not been the words of a sane woman. He would endeavour to show them that she was subject to fits of insanity. He would call a reliable witness to prove her violence in youth, and strange attacks of melancholy in riper years. Her mother, as would be

testified, had been the victim of delusions, and it was more than likely that an hereditary mania, transient, but acute during the paroxysms, had been transmitted to the daughter. He would not prolong the patience of the jury in any unnecessary way, but would at once call his only witness, Manuel Garcia.

At that familiar name, uttered in a loud, clear voice, the wretched girl in the dock looked with wildly affrighted eyes towards the entrance. Was her stepfather dead, and did they then summon his angry spirit to judge her? If he were still in the world of human beings, how could he know of her situation?

The Judge, too, gazed with a strained look, almost as tense and fearful as the prisoner's, towards the outer passage. There was a short delay in the appearance of the witness after his name had been called, but he came at last, leaning on a strong stick. An elderly foreigner, burly, and of dark skin and grizzled black hair. He had gold rings in his ears, and a nautical cut about him. He was of a class more well-to-do than Spanish peasantry, for he wore a gold chain to his watch, and the texture of his clothes was good. His voice was harsh and guttural, but he appeared to understand English fairly well, though speaking it in a foreign way. He made the sign of the cross reverently, as he kissed the Bible.

"Your name is Manuel Garcia?"

"Yes, Señor."

"You are the master of a trading vessel in the Mediterranean?"

"Yes, Señor."

The man's black eyes wandered a little from Mr. Spencer's face.

"And you are the cousin and stepfather of a girl called Maria Garcia?"

The Spaniard nodded his head in affirmation, with a slight evidence of impatience, looking up and down curiously, as though seeking where she who was lost might be found. His anxious eyes seemed to say, "Where is she?" for indeed, little of her could now be seen. She had fallen back in the chair placed for her, and only a white, scared face peered above the bar. Mr. Spencer pointed to the dock.

"Do you recognise the prisoner?"

The old man and the girl simultaneously looked at each other. So, looking over the space between them—a great gulf fixed, it seemed to both—Manuel Garcia, with an exceedingly bitter cry, inarticulate, but mournfully passionate, stretched out his veined old hands, seamed and marked with many scars, to the poor sinner. Maria, shuddering, held fast with one hand to the iron bar, which was hot beneath her touch. A red spot burned on either cheek now.

"*Dios mio!* it is she. The child of my adored wife, of the sainted one who is now in heaven."

He wiped the heavy sweat from his brow with tremulous fingers.

"She, *she* has killed a man, you do say, Señor, one who loved her and left her? You lie, you English beasts all! She never had a lover. She ever turned her face with anger from the men who sought her. It is positive that

some of your cold island blood flows in this child of *mi Paquita.*"

There was suddenly a little disturbance at the Judge's table. This austere officer had fallen back in his chair. John Spencer sprang over his bench in a moment, and mounted to his side.

"Some water here at once," he said authoritatively. "Open another window, you fools! The heat is suffocating in this court."

The officers of the court hastened to obey this compulsory mandate. Meanwhile the Judge revived, and sat up stiffly in an attitude which declared no abatement of dignity. He looked steadily at the witness, and, in a voice which seemed familiar to none, said faintly:

"Go on with the trial."

This was indeed the most terrible moment in Sir Edward Mallison's life. A solemn hour, when he saw retribution rise up with a ghostly arm and point backwards down long years of respectability and prosperity to the sin of early manhood.

Paquita! The sound rang in his ears with mournful persistence. Yet how many years since he had heard that name? The name of Maria Garcia's mother was Paquita! Well, surely it was an everyday name in Spain? But five-and-twenty years ago at Cadiz he had been acquainted with a dark-eyed maid called Paquita, ay, and had loved one so called. She had been a lovely creature then, passionate, intense, and mournful. The gushing, liquid tones of a Southern woman's voice echoed again in tenderest endearments and appeal in his ears. Ah, those

prayers, those sighs, those tears, how they had wearied him, how easily they had been blotted out by years of fame!

But here was one before him, cowering down, accused and verily guilty of a great crime, whose face recalled beautiful Paquita's like a blurred portrait, whose voice and form had from the first sight of them struck him with a cold terror. Could there be any doubt whose child this guilty woman was? His Paquita's friends and relatives had all been sailors. Her kinsfolk he knew were called Garcia. In that olden time she had boasted of her respectable connections. Merciful Heaven! how resistless was the truth that faced him, how inexorable the judgment that threatened him! It might be that Maria was as clearly his child in the sight of God as his beloved and tenderly nurtured Anne. This poor outcast, about to be classed with criminals, was possibly his daughter! What revelations might yet come? This Manuel might have the clue to the girl's paternity. It was not likely that Paquita would have carried her secret to the grave.

The proud man, who had held his head high amongst his fellow-creatures as the pattern of integrity and righteous dealing, writhed and shuddered inwardly at the thought of discovery. Her disgrace was comparatively small, but how great would be his fall! Alas! the justice which he had spent his life in measuring out to others had been meted out to him again in a higher court—good measure, pressed down and running over, the interest paid on a cruel desertion and long years of forgetfulness.

It seems just to us poor human sinners that we should be made to suffer and bear the consequences of our recent sins. We do not call out if punishment comes swiftly on our misdeeds; it is not altogether unexpected. But when the transgressions and iniquities of a far-off youth rise up to judge us, we cry out against the cruelty of God or fate. The slow fruition of sin leaves a harvest unexpected.

It was a ghastly retribution that visited this man. The purchase-money of youthful love and pleasure had accumulated interest so slowly, so secretly. His child arraigned for the murder of one of her own blood who had played her false, guilty of a horrible crime, and to be condemned to death, perchance, by her sole parent! Ah! it was a grievous tragedy indeed. What if Anne should learn it eventually? It was not impossible; and the Judge quailed before the thought of that Nemesis. In that solemn hour of dread, light words of hers came back to his mind, as the light words of those we love do come in our moments of extreme anguish.

"Take care," she had said playfully, "that the sins of your youth never rise against you." How well he remembered the loving intonation of her voice! "I daresay you were a very naughty young man. Whatever would become of you if your *Virgo* weighed you in the balance, and found you wanting? No one else would have mercy on you."

Mercy! was it for him to look for mercy? Anne must not know, should never know. Who was there to reveal the past if Manuel Garcia's evidence did not? The

prisoner did not know the name of her mother's betrayer, most certainly.

John Spencer might put his finger on the truth. Had he already a suspicion? Had some thread given him a clue? How had he managed to bring his witness here? Terrible fears and imaginings beset the miserable man; suspicions and questions without end came thronging to torture him. For days and nights a doubt had hung about him. From the night of her arrest, his thoughts had been concerned hourly about the Spanish girl. The doubt was dispelled now, and the shape of evil was clear and appalling. Yet in the confirmation of a terrible fear there is a stimulating influence. His certainty lent the Judge new strength. He cast off all appearance of weakness, shortly regaining his senses, and gathering his wits together. He had need to be clear-headed now. To the spectators he appeared to listen to the evidence with closer attention after his momentary indisposition.

"I tell you all, you English dogs, she never had a lover, this child of *mi Paquita*!"

The words were reiterated with fierce anger as the old man looked about him at the wigged gentlemen.

"Your wife—the prisoner's mother—is dead?" said John Spencer, very gently.

"Yes, yes, for many long years. *Bendito Dios*, my prayers have before now released her soul from the pains of purgatory."

He wrung his hands passionately, while the tears rolled down his withered cheeks.

John went on in the same gentle way.

"You adopted your wife's child?"

"Yes, she has been to me as my very own since she was a little one in arms—as *la hija de mi sangre* (the child of my blood)."

For a moment the counsel glanced at the listening Judge. It was such a rapid glance that few saw it. Sir Edward Mallison was bending forward with an imperturbable look on his features.

"Had you any knowledge of the prisoner's father?"

The counsel's questions appeared to many wide of the mark. Some wondered that he was not checked.

"He came from over the sea; he was an English dog, they said. He was a traitor. He will burn hereafter. I pray the eternal God's curse may not cease to rest upon him."

Manuel Garcia shook his hand fiercely in the air, as though he saw his foe. At last the counsel approached his text.

"The prisoner's mother, I understand, was subject to attacks of delirium before the birth of her child. Was it so?"

The old man shook his head angrily. A red light came into his eyes.

"What you say?" he said defiantly.

"Her mother, was she not at times not in her senses—mad?"

The bronzed old sailor looked towards the jury box with most piteous entreaty. There were few in it who were not moved by the spectacle of his grief.

"Alas! is it for me to say evil of my beloved dead? Will it be well to speak what is truth? Can it save her child? To her it will be no matter now. The merciful God will have restored her peace. Yes, yes, Señor, I will tell all that I have not spoken before. It is true that at times my Paquita, before she did die, did not know me at all. She would sit silent at my feet, looking over the sea long hours. When the little one came she was ungentle towards it, and said that it should surely die. Before the little Maria was born she never spoke, but wept and prayed much. She was angered to fury if evil was said of him who had left her. When we were married she said she had no love for me. I thought to win her from her sadness, from her silent ways; but no, never, never did she change. The good God took her from her misery, and she rests now at the blessed Virgin's feet."

It was pitiful to hear the tale of devotion told so simply with many pious ejaculations. A few sobs were heard from women. Many of the men looked grave.

"Maria Garcia grew up in your house, and was much indulged?"

The old man nodded

"She was a wayward child; she would have her own ways. She was obedient to none."

"But was she not specially irritable when crossed, and subject to violent attacks of anger?"

The witness smiled feebly.

"No, Señor, not more than they all. The maids they are ever wilful when an old man is ruler."

John Spencer paused a moment, knitting his brows anxiously.

"But two years ago she had an attack of brain fever. Was there nothing peculiar in her behaviour subsequently?"

Manuel turned his face once again to the prisoner, as if to be sure that she was there to hear.

"*Oh, Dios!* yes, it is true. She too was what you call mad, for a space long. She did return from the aunt at Seville to my house at Cadiz, and did talk wild and look so strange. Day by day she was worse, and used wicked words, and refused to eat. She would rave at night as one with a devil. My poor Maria, oftentimes she did not know me. I did let them call the *medico*, who did come often, many days and nights. At last he did calm the fever, and she was silent and weak, like a little child. *Ahi!* the medicine from our *botica* (apothecary) was slow to make her strong. She did move so softly about the rooms, and never did sing as before. Then after a time she did, I suppose, grow tired of the dull life at Cadiz, and did run away, and leave my house. It was while I was absent on a voyage. I did hear about her once when I was at Gibraltar, and then never no more, though I did spend money to find traces of the little one. Only a week ago I did get the letter from the gracious lady to call me to England. The letter it did travel from the Consul to one other Manuel Garcia before it did reach me. The words in it said that Maria was in peril of her life, and I did think she might be sick, and did come at once. What can I do to save her? Good gentlemen, all; tell me what words to speak. Ah! be merciful to one so young. You

need, yourselves, to ask mercy of the good God. Señor, I can speak no more. I have said all to you before this morning. *Dios de mi alma!* it cannot be true that this child of Paquita has killed a man! That hand so small and weak has no power to hurt a fly. She was ever cold, but never, never cruel."

He broke down, sobbing like a child, and they led him gently away.

Mr. Brownwigg did not think it necessary to cross-examine this witness, turning his eye-glass steadily towards the ceiling.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE urgent, passionate speech made by the counsel for the defence lingered long in the recollection of those who heard this trial. He pleaded with intense earnestness the prisoner's youth, her wrongs, and the singular violence which assailed her at times—what was, in fact, madness.

John Spencer went beyond the province of forensic argument. He did not lean on his dialectic skill, or use the cold language of reason, but became eloquent in an appeal to the tenderest sentiments of human hearts. Never again could Miss Mallison bring the charge of inhumanity or cold-heartedness towards suffering against this man. He, whose spirited oratory dealt on ordinary occasions with the humorous side of life—whose speeches were replete with sarcasm and logic, who was almost able to reason that black was white—abandoned his usual tactics. He no longer played with the understandings of his hearers, and forebore to flash about witty fireworks. He made fierce onslaught on treachery, diving deep to the mainsprings of human passion, and touching with a master-hand the chords of pity. He portrayed vividly the maddened moods of a woman forsaken, a woman young and beautiful, and with the taint of melancholy and insanity in her blood.

But John Spencer knew while he spoke that he had

failed to establish Maria Garcia's madness. He saw it in the pitiful faces of the jury; he felt it in the unspoken commiseration of the friends about him.

"The tale of wrong-doing," said he finally, in a voice which appealed and protested, "which preceded this unhappy girl's birth, the story of a mother abandoned, you have all heard. You must call to mind that these women, mother and daughter, both forsaken by false lovers of the same nation, belong to the most passionately fond race on God's earth. A Spanish woman's devotion is unequalled. It seems to me that in the annals of wrong-doing and crime which I have for many years listened to, no sadder history has been recorded. For this is a twice-told tale of desertion. Heaven has but stayed its retribution to strike a more terrible vengeance. It may be that the father of this poor sinner yet lives, lives to see his sins visited upon his child's head. Perchance no human voice will arraign him, saying, 'Thou art the man;' for still is the voice of that loyal one that might have betrayed his baseness. Yet, do you believe that he is not guilty and responsible for this crime? A mother, dying broken-hearted, leaves to her child an inheritance of melancholy mania and wild moods. That these should, under the fostering influence of adverse circumstances, develop into fits of madness, who can wonder?

"Maria Garcia's devoted love led her to forsake home, kindred, and easy circumstances, to seek the idol who had left her desolate. A long and restless search in a strange land, eating the bread of servitude, wearing the yoke

of obedience, only fostered her passion. She was of a proud and independent family, yet all traditions of respectability and freedom from control were forgotten and set aside in the desperate yearning to look again on the man she loved. If we could but know of her lonely communings with grief and memory, of the despairing fear that she might never find him! Indeed, no man sees as from a woman's restless heart, or even faintly guesses at the depth and strength, ay, the endurance, of her nature. When I think of that frail creature you see now in the dock, travelling unprotected over the sea, doing battle with all the difficulties of a foreign tongue and country, never yielding to discouragements, looking, hoping continually for the end she sought, I am amazed at the power of a woman's will to conquer difficulties. Daily in the streets of a great city, where she believed he dwelt, she sought him patiently, unwitting that those who sheltered him were of his blood and name. This Spanish girl, silent and resolved, was strong to suffer —to wait. A purpose, fixed and steady, reigned in her heart, and she would not abandon it. She had travelled a great way to find a man whom she loved, to forgive him the past, to throw herself at his feet and crave for pity, perchance offering him her future. The self-abandonment of a vehement nature inspired by a passion of love who can measure? It will leap over every barrier, confront shame and disgrace, ay, face death itself without fear. She found him, as we know, at last. Where or at what moment it matters not, nor can I tell you. Probably it was a surprise to both, an unexpected meeting. But

with the discovery of his name and station she learned also that he was bound to another woman, that he would wed the mistress she served.

"Meantime, as far as we can guess, he sought her out of deliberate intention, making light of his chains, speaking soft words to her, and even coming from the presence of a pure woman, his future wife, and daring to caress her. Gentlemen, it is unavailing to gloss over the character of the dead. Vain, unscrupulous, and pleasure-loving, he sacrificed no whims to principles of duty. This pretty thing, whose heart he had well-nigh broken, was sweet to look at and to pass a leisure hour with. He must soothe her angry jealousy, and pacify her into silence. Can we doubt, judging by his conduct, that some such thoughts animated the murdered man? What happened on that night, when the hand of an infuriated girl nerved itself to lift a revolver to the lips of one she passionately loved, of one whose kisses were probably warm on her face, we cannot say. Some devilish whisper may have hinted at a future together, at treachery to a wife; or it may be at the last moment that some better thought stirred in a lover's breast, and that he spoke of a final parting. In mercy let us cloak up in charity that last scene; let us believe that a sudden access of delirium clouded the girl's tortured brain, and strengthened her hand with the desperation of a maniac. There was no evidence of a struggle in the gun-room. His weapons had been lying about the whole day, according to the butler's testimony. Captain Mallison was known to be singularly careless with firearms. The girl, from all evidence, must have taken the man's life

unawares, without warning or threat. The cunning swiftness of a mad woman worked his doom. Her speech to Miss Mallison you have heard.

"Gentlemen, it seems that Maria Garcia *knew she was mad* in that awful hour. That her thoughts should go back to the stigma resting on her, that she should endeavour to throw it off, to disavow what might save her from terrible consequences, convinces me of this. She wished to die. She had intended to take her own life, only, in her excited mood, fancy wrought upon her. The vision, as she said, of a weeping mother had stayed her hand till it was too late."

In vain the counsel, raising his voice in fuller tones of what almost seemed supplication, importuned the feelings of the twelve. No urgent appeals availed against sound judgments. Justice must hold its own inexorable sway.

When the Judge, gathering up his notes, rose to sum up the case, there was a breathless silence in the court. Many looked apprehensively towards him. Without cause: he would not break down. His face was petrified almost to the rigidity of marble. Not a muscle worked or quivered as he lifted his head. His massive jaw and stern, close mouth had never looked more fit to pronounce faithfully. His voice no longer trembled or was faint, but rang sonorous and clear to the furthest corner of the hall. His bushy eyebrows sheltered eyes that blazed like hot coals—the only evidence of burning life within him. He had gathered himself well together for the supreme effort.

His charge to the jury was short and rapid. He was never observed to refer to the papers in his grasp. The

details of the trial seemed fixed in his powerful mind, and his memory was equal to recalling every jot of evidence. None could say he leaned towards mercy, but yet, so hard, so cold was his address, that none thought the dead man's blood cried to him. The victim might have been an absolute stranger, for all the emotion he testified.

As he weighed each trifling fact deliberately and carefully, the evidence tendered to prove insanity seemed fruitless. It was but as a featherweight in the scale of justice. He sounded it on all sides, and this was all there was to go upon. A young woman, forsaken, and about to become a mother, was melancholy and silent, shunning the public gaze as it was natural she should do. Later on, her feelings towards the child left to declare her shame became vindictive and angry. Cold and impatient towards a husband she did not love, her moods were uncertain and brooding. Finally, for weeks before death she was delirious: possibly the result of physical illness more than of mental distress. Did such facts warrant the assumption that she was mad, or afflicted with dangerous mania? Were such inclinations likely to be transmitted to her child? The girl, Maria Garcia, of an untutored and passionate nature, had been let loose from restraint at an early age in a country where restraint was necessary, and, as a rule, strictly enforced. Ardently passionate, she had yielded her whole soul to a strong love—in itself a sort of madness. Being deserted, she had suffered a brain fever, in which she had raved and been violent, as a matter of course. Ultimately she had run away from an uncongenial home, seeking service in an English family at Gibraltar, where

she had proved herself to be unmanageable, and subject to fits of depression. Were these statements enough to satisfy the jury that she actually was a victim of hereditary insanity, that her temper was beyond her control? Dementia embraced a wide field, showing peculiar and varying symptoms. But if the door of mercy were too widely opened to such pleas, it would relax perilously the safety of mankind. It was for them to decide if there was sufficient evidence tendered to justify a merciful verdict.

Not a jot or tittle of the evidence had previously escaped the Judge's remarks. When he finally sat down the multitude shook their heads. Those experienced in such matters were of opinion that the jurymen understood his mind to be opposed to an acquittal. Though the tragic under-current of history was known but to the Judge and one other, the trial had been sufficiently thrilling to stir the pulses of a densely-packed audience. Those who had fought lustily for standing-places in the ranks, and those of a higher degree who, throughout the hottest hours of a sultry day, resolutely stuck to their benches in this stifling hall, felt that they had been amply rewarded by hearing a tale of wrong, and treachery, and passion such as never might be recorded again within a lifetime.

Towards the close of the day the heat had become yet more intense, though the sun had withdrawn its light behind heavy clouds. Every window above and around was wide open, but not a breath of air appeared to enter by skylights or any other aperture. The atmosphere was

charged with oppression. Even breathing seemed a labour. During the Judge's summing up the clouds had gathered more darkly. With the filing out of the jury an ominous growl of thunder made itself heard. More quickly the darkness seemed to spread. In the furthermost recesses of the hall black night seemed to have already come. Now and again a sheet of lightning flashed in the gloom, illuminating white, anxious faces. A faint female scream was occasionally heard when the blue light gleamed.

Mr. Spencer sat at the table before the dock in an attitude of bodily exhaustion. His head was bowed in his hands, and his face not visible. The Judge leant back in his chair, serene and majestic. None of the crowd seemed able to shake off oppressive fears. The ladies had ceased to whisper, and cast anxious glances from time to time towards the jurymen's room.

The prisoner, with her little hands clasped before her, alone seemed free from the awful tension of suspense. She believed her life hung in the balance—but what was that? The worst had befallen her. She had brought disgrace upon her people. Let the end come quickly now.

The retirement of the twelve was of short duration. A bare ten minutes sufficed them. A thrill went through the darkness as the door opened, creaking, to admit them once more.

John Spencer never stirred. He knew what was coming.

Subjected to the ordinary question, the foreman, in a

loud, clear voice, pronounced the prisoner Guilty of Wilful Murder. Without recommendation to mercy, Maria Garcia was accounted guilty of the crime for which she was arraigned.

The usher commanded silence. The Judge stretched out a hand for the black cap. He stood up, drawing himself to the full height of his commanding stature. A momentary hush. In the pause a terrific clap of thunder broke above the building. Then followed a silence that could be felt: and in that silence the Judge spoke. It was a marvellous effort of will. The doom of the miserable girl before him was delivered without tremor or agitation, in that clear, full-sounding voice which so well befitted his office, seeming to cut every falsity and injustice in twain.

John Spencer, palsied with fear and horror, lifted his face at last, gazing in wonder and awe at this man who could, unmoved, sentence his own child to a shameful death.

For John knew all.

With wondering, fascinated eyes, the miserable prisoner looked on at the Judge's movements. What was that little piece of black stuff in his hand? What was he going to do with it? Why did the people sigh, for Maria felt the breath that passed through the darkness. As the Judge raised the ominous cap and placed it on his head she gave a little involuntary shudder. How ugly it looked! Then followed her sentence, in a voice distinct and remorseless. Without emotion, without customary words of warning or exhortation—short, sharp, and decided it

was spoken. Maria listened intently to the opening: "Prisoner at the bar, after a careful trial you have been found guilty of the crime of which you have been accused." She caught the final words with a faint smile of welcome, "and to be hanged by the neck till you are dead, and may God have mercy on your soul."

CHAPTER XX.

Mr. Spencer went out by a side door before the court was cleared of the multitude. Outside, the pavement was crowded by the curious, who stood together in knots, questioning some excited or awe-stricken auditor who had issued from the building. It was raining heavily, but John did not wait for overcoat or umbrella before rushing down to the Mallisons' lodgings.

He, and no other, must tell Anne the disastrous tidings.

The heavy clouds, which had broken at last, discharged their moisture in torrents. Loud claps of thunder and flashes of lightning occurred at intervals. Unmindful, or seemingly unconscious of the elementary strife, the barrister held on his way, taking short cuts through devious lanes which led to his goal. He found Anne pacing the limits of her sitting-room upstairs, with hands locked before her, and eyes large and sad. She looked up at him quickly, in a moment staggering back a few paces. His pale looks, his breathless agitation, his downcast glance, sufficed to tell the truth.

"I have failed," he said in a hoarse voice, sitting down and resting his head upon his hands. "She has been sentenced to death."

"Oh, God! what is justice?" she said wildly. Then,

crossing to his side, she added, in a terrified whisper: "But they will not hang her?"

She quickly raised one hand to her own throat as though she herself were choking. For she thought at that moment of the cruel cord.

"No, it is not likely," he answered briefly. "The sentence will probably be commuted to life servitude."

Anne's hand dropped.

"My father, he did not break down at the last?" Anne said presently, in the same agonised whisper.

John Spencer lifted his head, turning himself round to look at the marble face. The girl's breath fluttered and her lips were quite bloodless, but he could not read her eyes. For a moment he thought that she had a suspicion of the truth. Impossible? How could she know? Could any words that Manuel Garcia had spoken in his short interview alone with her, have revealed threads of the truth? He never thought of Maria's possessions, or that some chance search in Portland Place might have brought attesting trifles to light.

John said to himself that his own fears were traitors. At any cost this secret of Sir Edward's life must be hidden from his daughter. A prison would soon close over the miserable sinner who alone could give the clue, and oblivion would spread its mantle over the past.

"No, no; he seemed to recover his strength towards the end of the trial. He looked almost like his old self. The sentence was pronounced with great firmness." Here Anne shuddered from head to foot, and raised her handkerchief to her dry lips. "I saw him

walk out of the court before me. Most probably he is waiting for a cab."

Anne went slowly to the window. The street was almost empty, the rain sweeping down the gutters in broad streams. Now and again the rattle of wheels was heard. She came back presently, and stood before John, looking down with something that was like entreaty on her face. So she stood for a few seconds without speaking. Her beautiful face was very sorrowful, and seemed aged by its gravity. Her long, black gown, her extreme pallor and subdued voice, seemed unnatural to the haughty Miss Mallison, once radiant with health and strong in her decisions. Looking at her now, the man thought of her as when they had parted at St. Pancras Station only a few months back. The pride of life was gone from her. Not a trace of the arrogant, determined girl, who was then walking blindfold into the pit laid for her, now remained. All the sad meekness of great misery was about her.

At this moment John was almost persuaded that Anne *had* loved her dead cousin. He, too, yearned, like Maria, to hear her lips say "I did not love him."

At last, after long dumb-looking, she spoke, drooping her eyes as slow tears gathered in them.

"Do you think that in a few days—or by-and-by—before they take her away"— (Anne trembled so that she had to put out a hand to a chair to steady herself)—that I might see *her*—Maria?"

The request, coming unexpectedly, startled the man. He was visibly perturbed. An interview might have fatal consequences; further revelations might lead Anne to

some certainty. Was this what she was seeking after? He did not answer at once, but, standing up, withdrew himself a few paces from the girl, and leant against the mantelpiece. Anne followed him; she almost touched him. Still in the same low voice, in the same deprecating way, she pleaded earnestly:

"I do beseech you, John, to manage this for me. It is not difficult or impossible, is it?" She lifted her grey eyes with the most urgent entreaty. He met the glance, and, turning from her, shook his head.

"It can do no good to her or to you," he said huskily.

Then she went on, her voice breaking often, and her breath coming heavily, while unconsciously she laid one hand upon his arm.

"Before she dies, or that terrible death in life begins, she would like to know that I forgive her. It is right that she should be told that. Oh, John, John, can't you understand that it may comfort *her* to know that I did not —love *him*?"

So low did Anne's voice sink at the last words that he only just caught the faint whisper. He threw her hand from his arm with a sudden movement of his elbow, turning from her, and walking to the window. She did not follow him this time. There was silence for a minute, and Anne's tears flowed unchecked down her face. A cab was heard to stop outside. John moved, and looked for his hat.

"Oh, John, have pity on me—on her!" cried the girl, wildly.

"Yes," he said, looking at her steadfastly; "you *shall* tell her. I will manage it for you."

* * * * * *

When the Judge stumbled up the dark staircase he met John Spencer descending. He did not ask him to return, but, after a brief exchange of remarks, wished him good-bye.

On entering the sitting-room he expected to find Anne in the midst of preparations for departure. They were going back to town that night, and there was not much time to spare. But he found the room as he had left it in the morning,—books still lying about, rugs and shawls unstrapped on the sofa, and Anne's travelling-clock on the mantelpiece. The evening was gloomy, and but one window admitted light to the narrow apartment. Anne sat within its embrasure, looking out into the street.

"Anne." She did not turn round. "Where is Thomas?" he said, with angry impatience. "These things ought to be strapped up."

"He has been at the court-house, I expect," she said, coldly and faintly; "it appears an exciting case to all but you and me."

The Judge stirred at her tone.

"Do you not wish to go home to-night?" he said, sternly, yet not approaching her.

"Home?" she said, absently. Then she turned her back to the light. The little there was shone on her father's face.

"John Spencer has been here," she said, irrelevantly, but in a slow, distinct way, which would not allow him to

ignore the remark. Her eyes, tearless and hard once more, were fixed on the Judge's face. No trace of emotion or of an exhausting ordeal lingered about his personality. The worst was past. He was like a man relieved from some horrible oppression, wakened from a sickening nightmare.

"Yes, I met him going down stairs. I suppose he has told you?"

He looked at his daughter with cool indifference. It was well-assumed. The mask of stoicism was admirably worn.

"Yes," said Anne, slowly, and with effort. "He has told me that Maria is condemned, may even be hanged. Oh, father, could you not have saved her such a doom?" A wild passion, resembling fear, shone out of Anne's eyes. Her anguished look seemed to entreat denial of some horrible suspicion.

"She was guilty of a great crime," he said, coldly. Then, looking at her with an ironical sneer, he added: "*Your* mercy would indeed cover a multitude of sins! You forget, surely, that she killed your cousin, your husband that was to be, Anne—a man whom you must have loved well. Would you have such a crime condoned?"

She turned sharply from the cruel light in her father's eyes. She moaned, "This is terrible." Then she clasped her hands in a wild way, saying aloud, in a strong voice:

"Mercy and truth have *not* met together. God judge between you and her!"

CHAPTER XXI.

As the days went by, slowly and mournfully to Anne, she said nothing at home of her purpose of visiting the condemned girl at Lipswich. Such a project might have been vigorously combated, if not forbidden, and Anne was not one to stir up unnecessary strife. The thought of the county gaol was continually before her. The ordeal of sight and touch of Maria Garcia she dreaded, and yet longed for. Strange inconsistencies these. She shuddered before the thought of holding intercourse with one who had shed blood cruelly, but above, and stronger than the repulsion, a sentiment of attraction drew her towards Maria. It was as if some secret tie united them.

Day after day Miss Mallison waited for Mr. Spencer to communicate with her, confident that he, having passed his word, would not fail her. At last a letter did come from him, appointing to meet her on the morrow at the station, and to escort her on her journey to Lipswich. Anne had no preparations to make. She would be back early in the afternoon. On going to bed that night, with her chamber candlestick in her hand, she paused to say to her mother:

"I shall have an early breakfast in my room to-morrow, mamma. I am going out for the whole day. Do not ask me what I am going to do."

Anne spoke low but steadily, with her eyes fixed on the candle she held.

Lady Mallison stroked her black silk gown, and looked concerned, if not curious. But she was afraid of Anne now. The dignity of sorrow rested upon her, and made her unapproachable. Anne had gone through a terrible experience of late, and no doubt it was necessary to give way to her and humour her. It was shocking how she had lost appearance and flesh. There was nothing striking about Anne's looks now, with those hollow eyes and colourless lips. Her ladyship had given up thwarting and advising her daughter as formerly. The union which she had contemplated with so much satisfaction had fallen through, and a sort of disgrace had shadowed the family in her estimation. For it was disgrace to be connected with a murdered man, let alone the horrible and painful events that surrounded his death. Beneath such circumstances her ladyship was humbled, and less disposed to animadvert on Anne's inconsequent proceedings.

"Will you not take Tucker with you, my dear?" she suggested.

Since the catastrophe Anne had engaged no new attendant, rebutting the suggestion with vehement opposition.

"I prefer to go alone, mamma. My business needs no assistance," she said resolutely. After a momentary consideration, she said more gently, "John Spencer will look after me."

Lady Mallison's dull eyes blinked at Anne's candle, but she refrained from any comment, for a wonder.

And so Anne met John at nine o'clock the next morning, and went down by train with him to Lipswich. During the journey there was absolute silence between the pair, though Mr. Spencer had secured a carriage to themselves, and no interruption could be feared. Anne was in mourning, of course, and had veiled herself closely on this occasion. John had not seen her since the day of the trial, and it seemed to him that she was languid in her movements, and that her voice was sad and low.

Never in her life had Anne been near a prison—to her knowledge she had never seen the outside of one. Her companion observed that she was trembling violently as they drove in a cab through the well-remembered streets, and a little way out of the town, to where an ugly red building frowned on the highway. Anne waited in her cab while Mr. Spencer went through the necessary preliminaries of presenting his order. He was some time gone. The governor of the gaol was hospitable, and the well-known barrister had some difficulty in escaping from his audience chamber. At last he returned, and signed to Anne to get out. A warder was in waiting, by whom they were guided up and down many stairs. Finally they reached a long corridor, with half-a-dozen doors shut off it. The floor of this passage was flagged, the walls whitewashed. The air struck with an indescribable chill upon them. This gloomy space was lighted from the north, a shadowless light, with never a stray sunbeam from morn till eve. The gratings overhead caused Anne to glance about apprehensively. They were only ventilators, after

all. Like a child in her dependence now, Anne laid her hand on John's, drawing a long and hardly-repressed sob.

"Do not leave me—alone," she said. "I am afraid—now."

She had struggled not to say it, but the feeling of physical weakness suddenly overcame her. The keys in the warder's hand seemed to jingle with more noise and significance than was necessary. The door outside of which he paused was at the end of the passage, the most remote of all. He looked round over his shoulder to see if the lady and her escort followed. These two were not of the sort that usually visited condemned criminals. There was a grating low down, outside this cell. It could could be withdrawn noiselessly from without.

"She is always very quiet and well-behaved," said the man in a semitone. He spoke as though this was an exceptional case. Those who were at the point of death, and who swore and blasphemed, were more the rule. The bolt of the grating slid back at his touch, and he looked in. Anne glanced over his shoulder. Suddenly she dropped John's arm. The condemned cell had no longer any terrors for her. She threw back her veil, and her eyes looked steadily at him. Then, in a moment, he knew that she suspected the truth.

"I will go in alone, John. I am not afraid." A moment's pause. "There is something I must ask her; something I ought to know. It would be wicked of me to shrink from her."

Her last words Anne spoke emphatically, though in a

low voice. The man with the keys suffered her to enter the door he had unbarred, himself remaining outside. A conversation in ordinary tones would be inaudible to him. Mr. Spencer went away down the passage, with a gloomy brow. He mounted on a ledge, and looked out of a high window into a dreary courtyard, where some prisoners' coarse clothes were drying on a line.

Maria, who sat leaning with both arms on a small table, did not hear the door unbolted. Prison doors are noiseless sometimes. Neither did the soft approach of a woman rouse her. Anne Mallison came quite near to her, and still she did not raise her bowed head.

"Maria." So softly, so sweetly it was uttered, that it scarcely could be a real sound. The girl stirred a little, heaving a short sigh.

"Maria," repeated Anne again, a little louder than before, as she stretched out her strong right hand, the hand of which Maria had said more than once, "There is power in its touch." Now she laid it gently on the prisoner's shoulder, not with any timidity or the least trace of repugnance.

There was the light of a strange tenderness on Anne's face not to be accounted for. Some instinct from within softened all hardness and fear. Maria moved and trembled, muttering faintly:

"*Ahi, ahi!* those dreams of her pity, they come again."

Anne's hand crept round the bent neck.

"My lady, she ever comes and looks at me with cold reproach and with anger, but she never speaks. Holy Virgin! did I not hear her voice?"

The utterance of the unhappy girl was gentle and pathetic. Anne sank on her knees beside her. Her words were full of exquisite tenderness.

"Yes, indeed, my poor Maria, it is your young lady who has come to you. Open your eyes, turn your face, and look. It is no dream."

Maria, at this bidding, dropped her hands and turned a vacant look on Anne.

The change effected in a week upon her features was almost incredible. Consuming grief had wasted her flesh till her clothes hung loosely about her fragile form. It was sad to see the hollow eyes without fire, only with a fixed melancholy, the trembling lips, and the almost transparent hands. Her breath came quickly, without cessation.

"Oh, Jesus, thou art merciful! Virgin of many sorrows, I bless thee! My lady, oh, my dear lady, you have come, maybe—to forgive——"

The tears were in Anne's eyes; they brimmed over, they fell, hot and burning, upon Maria's loosely-clasped hands. She lifted one, and looked at the tear upon it with an expression of wonder.

"Senorita, you weep for me! Ah, this is strange, and I so great a sinner."

The cadence of the once musical voice was full of intense pathos. Anne's tears dripped through her fingers as she covered her face.

"Why have you come?" said Maria, pushing her chair back, and stooping slightly to look at the face hidden from her. "In not many days now I shall die, and it will be

forgotten by all but me, who will suffer—suffer for ever the pains of hell. None will pray for me."

Anne rose up. Subduing her emotion, she said:

"Maria, there is yet hope that you may not die—your sentence may be commuted. If so, you know you will be in prison all your life." Anne paused to stifle a sob. "But I shall not be able to see you again. Our time is precious. Is there nothing I can do for you before they take you away from here? You will not see Manuel Garcia, they say, but——"

Maria started to her feet with a passionate cry, throwing out her palms as though to keep some one away.

"God of my life!—see him? No, never, never! I have brought shame upon his name, the honest name which he gave me. Let him go, let him forget. It will not be for long. He is old, and he will be at rest with my sainted mother soon—soon."

Then silence fell between the girls. Maria looked at Anne with a lingering, questioning regard.

"Ah, dear lady, *yet* there is *one* little grace you can accord to me." Her hand went to the bosom of her dress. "It is that now you will take the picture of my dear mother and some letters that once were written to her. The companion picture of him who was my father you will find in the drawer of my chamber in your house."

Maria paused, for Anne tottered slightly. She could not know that Anne had already found it, and had recognised it as a duplicate of an old daguerreotype at Dullingford. That mystery had not absolutely explained itself then, but Anne had trembled before the terrible suspicion

awakened. She recovered herself quickly now and held out her hand, while a sickly smile played about her lips. The girl had brought out of their hiding-place a thin packet of letters and a morocco case.

"I could not bear that these should ever be touched by hands that did not reverence, and so I carried them always near my heart. Yet these letters: they bear but the Christian name of my father—nothing that could betray——"

Maria did not at once surrender her possessions to the outstretched hands.

"See," she said, touching the spring of the closed locket, and revealing the miniature within; "was she not beautiful?" And indeed it was a lovely girlish face therein portrayed.

The letters were bound together with a tarnished tinsel cord. Maria undid the packet.

"I would have destroyed them long time since, only they did seem to me like living things, and to her they were of much value. Alas! he was my father, and now I do know that shame attaches itself to him or to me. Manuel he did tell it all. Look! there is no name but Edward. Ah! I have read them often. See how every word breathes love! '*My beloved Paquita*' repeated many times. And yet—he was false."

There was no need of any further question. The testimony of faded ink was sufficient. Anne's glance, fixed and full of terror, remained upon the open letter which Maria had spread before her. *That* writing she knew full well. In the course of years it had hardly changed at all.

That Edward was familiar to her. How often had she rallied her father on the peculiar twists and curves of his letters! "Your individuality is too marked," she had said, playfully, once. For a moment she closed her eyes.

"Oh, mercy!" she cried, with a sudden gasping sob, realising the fatal truth at last.

"It is nothing," she said, with a supreme effort, recovering herself, and looking steadily at the other girl.

"Yes, Maria," you may give me those letters. Believe, they will be very sacred to me."

The prisoner, kissing the glass surface of the portrait with passionate vehemence for the last time, gave it, with the letters, into Anne's hands.

"The holy Virgin will bless you, dear lady. I am not worthy to touch you. My prayers are not received in heaven. *Ahi!* how can I show to you the fervent gratitude of my heart?"

Again she leaned her head upon her hands in her former desponding attitude. Once more her eyes became vacant. Anne roused her with a light touch.

"It is time for me to go now. My poor child, I am not afraid to take your hand. We are all sinners; I, too, have sinned deeply. Do not cease to pray; God's ears are closed to none. He will hear you still, if you cry to Him with all your heart. And, Maria"—Anne's voice fell to a whisper—"if it will comfort you to know it, I will tell you that my grief is not of the kind you think. It is for my own errors that I sorrow most. It seems sometimes to me that I am in part responsible for—your crime. Dearest, I came to see you, to tell you that—I did not love—*him*."

Her bitter tears dropped slowly. In a moment the prisoner was grovelling at Anne's feet, with her dark head pressed against her dress. She slid down with a rapid movement, a tempestuous torrent of tears and sobs shaking her.

"*Ahi! ahi!* The merciful God has sent an angel to give me peace before I die. Now, now I can pray indeed. There is no longer that black and deadly sin of jealousy nestling like a poisonous serpent at my heart. Oh, the relief, the blessedness!"

Anne raised the poor, palpitating creature with tender pity, the tears running down her face. She was amazed to feel how light the burden was. Supporting her in her own strong arms, with a close and clinging protection, she said solemnly, looking into the dark, dazed eyes so near her own:

"This is good-bye, Maria. I shall never see you again—in this world." Here the sobs choked her. "Yet I do believe that hereafter—if you should die—that what is hidden from you now—will become clear. Are you listening, Maria?"

For an answer the thin arms clasped Anne closer. She went on, feeling every pulse of the clinging form.

"You will understand *then* why, even with the guilt of your crime upon you, I can say—I love you. Something, dearest, that brings us very near together has been revealed to me. See—I can hold your hands without fear or loathing, though they are stained with the blood of my kinsman. Oh, God! not *my* kinsman alone." For a second Anne was choked by heavy sobs. "Dearest, though

the shadow of death lies over you, I cannot tell you the reason of this. It is better that you should not know. The sins of a father have been visited upon the children. I hold you more sinned against than sinning."

The hot lips were raised closer to Anne's ear.

"I am not afraid to die—it will be rest—only—forgive," whispered Maria.

Then Anne held the small face away from her, so that she could look at it.

"Maria, dearest, this is our last farewell. I, who have suffered deeply in a way you cannot understand, whose life-long trust has been shattered, have nothing to forgive you. The misery brought on me is not of your working. The grave, or what is even worse—oh, God have pity on you!—may soon lie between us. How can I bear to know that you, through all the years of your life—you are so young still—may suffer?"

Anne's whole soul went forth in the final crisis of parting.

"Lift up your face to mine—dearest one—and kiss me once as if—I were your—sister."



CHAPTER XXII.

WHEN Anne reached her home on the day of her visit to Lipswich Gaol, John Spencer left her on the doorstep. She bade him farewell, without any words of thanks, not asking him to enter. Her gratitude was only expressed in an eloquent look of her sad eyes. And she suffered him to hold her hand. Nay, she held both hands out towards him before they parted. Words would not come at once, and the door of the house opening, she entered.

It was yet early in the afternoon, and Lady Mallison was abroad on her customary airing. Though the sky might fall, those bay thoroughbreds must be exercised. Her ladyship even did her duty by her horses.

Anne did not go upstairs at once, but paused to inquire if her father was in the house. Somewhat to her surprise, Croker replied in the affirmative. It was unusual for Sir Edward to spend an afternoon at Portland Place. The club, or his chambers, shrouded his daily doings from his family.

"He ain't been out the whole of this day, Miss Anne," volunteered the butler, in addition.

"Is there anyone with him, Croker?"

"No, Miss."

"Is he expecting anyone?"

"No, not as I knows of. He said at lunch-time that I was to tell him when you came home."

Croker had a suspicion where Anne had been.

"Oh," said the girl, leaning a moment against the balustrade; "you need not do that; I will go to him. And, Croker, see that we are not disturbed."

When Anne spoke in that authoritative way the old butler was perturbed. He looked after her as she walked away, shaking his head sorrowfully.

Anne did not remove her crape veil till she had passed into the library and had closed the door. She stood a few paces from her father, supporting herself against a high-backed chair. Her agitation was manifest to him. On her entry, the Judge had looked up from his writing in a casual way. He had frowned as though at an unwelcome interruption. But in a moment he composed his face to a set smile. To Anne that smile seemed cruel. With one comprehensive glance her father had read that she had something to tell. Such a mingling of pity, shame, and confusion was visible on the girl's face! How could she say this thing to him? Was it for her to bring him into condemnation? The Judge was on the alert for revelations nowadays. He would not be safe till the wretched sinner was beyond the reach of outer communication. He laid down his pen and folded his arms, looking steadily towards Anne, more than at her. His face was hard and implacable. The antagonism that had grown up between these twain from the day of Anne's engagement to her cousin seemed to have increased more and more with every successive event. Gone were the playful speeches,

the pretty flatteries, the filial faith and trust, the paternal affection and pride. Each avoided the other, and met with coldness—parted in silence. Oh! it was terrible.

"I have been to Lipswich Gaol," began Anne, at last, clasping her hands more tightly over something she held. Sir Edward Mallison's eye fell upon the parcel.

"Ah, indeed. So I thought," he said, without particular stress, as though it were the most natural thing in the world.

His indifference roused her. She did not falter when she spoke again.

"You thought that I would go?" she said boldly, looking at him. He threw his head back, smiling a trifle more broadly.

"I knew that my daughter had her hand upon a mystery. Has she at last solved it?"

This imperturbable serenity, this cool carelessness, caused in Anne a revulsion of feeling. No pity stayed her tongue now. She recalled the sight of the frail figure she had so lately held in her arms, and nerved herself for the task she had resolved on.

"I bring you a dead woman's property. Maria Garcia gave me these; they belong of right to YOU."

She stretched out her hand, and laid the packet of letters on the table before him. He did not at once take them up, but his eye fell on the little tarnished silver cord which still bound them. Once he had said that Anne would never have a steady hand to weigh in the balance those she loved. But the hand did not tremble now.

"Astræa," he said, with that terrible smile playing about

his lips, "pray have you any other little keepsakes that belong to me?" He saw she still held something back. His hand was toying restlessly with the little tassel, but he spoke quietly.

"Yes, there is the portrait of Maria's mother. She had a beautiful face. You have seen it before."

Anne opened the morocco case and set it down before him. There was neither derision nor doubt in her voice; it rang with emphatic conviction. Alas! she knew all.

"You have fulfilled your mission admirably, noble Astræa. These are wicked times on this earth. Do you not sigh for heaven, fair Virgo?"

The cutting irony of his tone smote her cruelly. She shuddered at that voice of raillery. To the last he braved and defied her suspicions. In vain she lifted up her head. It would avail nothing to accuse and reproach him.

"Is there anything more you wish to say, Anne?" he said, watching the struggles of her mind. All human sentiments were petrified by that cold voice. Anne no longer resisted, but allowed her own powerlessness.

"I am going," she said, in a hollow voice. The Judge held the portrait of Paquita loosely in one hand, the letters lying on the table before him.

"Stay a moment. If it is any satisfaction to you to learn that this prisoner in whom you take *such a deep and unaccountable interest* will be spared, I can afford it you. Application has been made to the Home Secretary by influential voices, and her sentence is this day commuted to penal servitude for life."

Anne wrung her hands and turned to go. At the door

she halted and looked back. It was a feeble, womanish protest, a long, yearning look. Unpitying eyes were upon her with ruthless compulsion. She must go. There was fierce defiance of her tenderness; scorn of her passionate yearning. He confessed no knowledge of a terrible secret by word or look. Anne was acting an absurd and tragic part, that was all. The past was irrevocable. He did not so much as admit remembrance of a past.

The Judge gave not the faintest sign of weakness or suffering, and Anne, who knew that he had condemned his own child to death, turned from him with almost loathing of his unnatural nature. With an agonised look of despair, cast back to linger in his memory, she disappeared. In crises such as these, human relations seem done away with. Anne forgot he was her father for the time being; she only seemed to recognise that he was a man who had sinned deeply, and knew neither repentance nor remorse.

Two days later the judicial world was amazed to receive the announcement of Judge Mallison's resignation of office. It was an almost unparalleled surrender of a handsome emolument, and on a poor pretext. The plea of ill-health, and consequent incapacity for office, was regarded as insufficient. For a man of such distinguished parts to sink into the shade of private life was an unheard-of piece of folly.

Sir Edward Mallison's legal eminence was duly commented on by leading articles in the daily papers, while Society journals blazoned his family circumstances abroad, with due regard to libel, but little to the truth. It was hinted by some that the *esclandre* of the murder at

Dullingford had something to do with this abdication of honours. Observers had remarked that Sir Edward Mallison had altered in appearance and manner during the summer, in fact, since the occurrence of the crime. Yet, amidst many scavenger pens and much well-coloured ink, no hint of the true tragedy was fished up from the sediment of the past. Raking amongst the dust-heaps of bygone years availed not. From his youth up, slander could not touch him. His rigid and equitable sway were not more unquestioned than was the purity of his private life. Though the successive steps of a famous Judge's path to honour were duly enlarged upon, no animadversive criticism touched his morality.

So the sin of Sir Edward Mallison's life remained unproven, and he went down to his grave without his secret coming to light. The wonderful stoicism which condemned a child to death was never made manifest in this world.

* * * * * *

Maria Garcia was known to be very ill. The papers took up the theme of her danger, and bulletins, not official, crept to the public ear. Curiosity was exercised about her. Those who had witnessed the trial thought she would die. That frail and excitable creature would not long survive the torture of a prison life.

Early one morning in August, before the Mallisons had left town, John Spencer came up to Portland Place in a hansom. He asked to see Anne at once, forgetting to dismiss his cab.

"Tell Miss Mallison," he said, with imperative haste, to

the man who admitted him, "that I wish to speak to her alone."

Anne was upstairs in the desolate school-room. She had seen him arrive from the window, and sent down to bid him come to her there. John Spencer had not been admitted to this room since Anne was a child. There he had taken her upon his knee many a time to chase away the tears over French verbs, or the puzzling morality of Mademoiselle. It was odd that he should pause outside this door now, for his errand was an urgent one. Ah! how well he remembered the last occasion on which he had entered here! He had helped Anne with some difficult piece of translation, and when she had bidden him good-bye, she had lifted her face to him with a child-like impulse.

"Ah, how kind you always are, John!" she had said, with a sort of wonder that life should not be all rule and measure.

He had not gone on being so kind always. As the years crept on, the impulsive child had become more reserved and independent, no longer craving assistance, but standing coldly apart from all help—perhaps needing it all the more. Now it seemed that something of her ignorant dependence had come to her again—the heart of a little child. She was not able to stand alone now. As Mr. Spencer entered the room she advanced quickly to meet him.

"You have something to tell me," she said breathlessly. His face was indeed very grave, but she was reassured by the look of his eyes.

"Maria Garcia will not suffer the consequence of her sin," he said gently, still retaining the hand Anne had mechanically placed in his. It trembled within his hold. Her tears gathered.

"Oh! say it quickly," she said, with a convulsive sob in her throat.

"There is a reprieve—from Heaven," he said. "She died gently without pain last night. The governor of the gaol telegraphed to me an hour ago."

So the end had come. The sinful, passionate heart had ceased its wild throbbing for ever. She was arraigned now before a higher tribunal, which might perchance look mercifully on a desperate deed.

"Oh, thank God, thank God!" cried Anne, wildly. "I have prayed for it day and night." Then she fell to terrible weeping. Her whole frame was shaken with her heavy sobs. She paced the room a few times with uplifted hands, shielding her face, while the sound of her grief could not be subdued. With the tears raining down her white face, she stood before John at last, saying brokenly:

"Oh, John! I know that you know. She was my father's child."

Gone were all restraints of propriety. Anne did not think of the world's verdict on such connections. The slur of illegitimacy counted as nothing in her mind. She who was dead and had been a sinner had once been quick with the same blood as flowed in her own veins. That was all her thought.

"It was that—always—I believe that made her so

different—from any other who had served me—and oh, I did not know—and sometimes—I think—I was not kind." The tender inflection of Anne's voice was very sad.

"It seems a great injustice" (Anne went on, with eyes cast down) "that was done to her from the beginning. Nothing can right those kinds of sin *afterwards*; and the consequences of her forsaken life—have been—so terrible It is not long ago, John, that I longed to take part in human cares and suffering—to bear some burden in the world. Oh! if I had known, if I had known the sort of sorrow and the shame that I should be asked to share—I should have shrunk away from it. Even now, John, it is torture to me to think—that I may have been in part—the cause—of her crime—and that her jealousy—was vain—because *he* was nothing to me."

The man stretched out his hands to the woman he loved, and she laid hers in his. How could he comfort her? He could not relieve her of this doubt.

Anne's eyes, wandering a little, fell upon a guitar. It had amused her leisure hours a few months back. The little hands that were still had twanged its strings to many a merry air. The servants had left the instrument unheeded on a high shelf. It was covered with dust; the strings had snapped; the gay ribbon was faded.

"Give it to me, John," Anne said in a tremulous whisper. "I will keep it always—it was *hers*."



CHAPTER XXIII.

Six months later Anne Mallison married John Spencer, greatly to the surprise of friends and relatives. She had known him all her life, which was a very sufficient reason, in the opinion of many, against the union. Though the wedding was celebrated privately and without advertisement thereof, everyone was amazed and disgusted at Miss Mallison's unfeeling behaviour.

She, the promised bride of one who had been inhumanly murdered, to wed another within so short a period of his decease! It was indecent, worse than heartless.

But what did she reck of the world's wonder or censure, she who had won her heart's desire and knew herself beloved—yes, even as she loved? Her faith, so grievously betrayed and shaken elsewhere, here was built upon a rock.

"I have loved you always, Anne," said John, plainly, when the veil was withdrawn, without any lover-like protestations or vows.

And this girl, learning finally the depth and constancy of the manly heart which was all her own, realised her blessedness. He who had loved her steadfastly, without hope of return, not suffering disappointment to canker his energy or industry, was worthy to be had in honour and respect. His power of endurance, his faithfulness, were unquestionable. When she knew how resolutely he had

toiled on at duty early and late, not defeated in his life-struggle by the loss of a personal hope, her affection for the man of her choice waxed stronger. He was her master in every way, and she yielded herself gladly to his sway with the beautiful meekness of a proud woman. To her he was a strong tower, a man amongst many.

When the last misunderstanding was swept away, Anne was her own accuser. She was all unworthy, she said. If she had but opened her eyes to the things near her, or stretched out her hand to receive; if she had not aimed to be regarded as one superior to womanly weakness, how different it all would have been! She had scoffed at love and womanly devotion a hundred times in John's hearing. She had spoken of marriage as a convenient contract, and had jeered at domestic joys. She had made herself unapproachable to him from any side of womanliness. And he had left her in that isolation which she had made for herself till the iron had entered into her soul.

It was long before her lover could chase the shadows of the past from her mind. They came back at times with redoubled vigour, and for awhile Anne would sicken with terrible remorse. She dwelt morbidly upon the engagement into which she had rushed so suddenly, so without consideration, attributing to that contract much of the evil that followed.

It was with the full, complete abandonment of her ardent nature, which had been so long checked, that Anne made surrender.

The overflow of passionate love and the flashing forth of guarded fires broke their bonds at last, and burst forth

in a mighty torrent of ecstasy. Her glorious eyes were radiant with happy tears. The delicious voice of strong love broke forth fluttering in the unmistakable accents:

"Do I love you, John? Oh, take me; I am yours. I have loved you always—always. How could you doubt it? Ah, yes, I hid it carefully. Though you laughed at my way of talking, though you were cruel often, I would not let you see it hurt me. You did not seem to understand at all—I thought you did not care. You had your business—your family—your life was full. Then I avoided you. I was afraid of myself—that you might see some day that—— At last you too seemed to avoid me; when we met you would hardly look at me. I could not bear my life as it was—so vain, so empty. I longed for some task, to bring me to the level of other people. And oh, John, my prayer was granted in a way I did not think of. I thought that I could *help him* and do him good. It was a vain and foolish thought. Oh, how hardly I have been punished!"

Anne paused a moment for breath, and the arms about her drew her closer.

"Then it was said that you were going to marry some girl at Exeter. You know what happened. I was wicked—oh, most sinful, to try and put away my love like that. And, John, the worst was that it made no difference in my feeling. I knew, after the first, that I should go on loving you the same, and that I could never be a true wife. Day by day I grew desperate with the fear of all that was to come. Then it all came out about Mabel, and I knew that we had been mistaken about you.

John, do not stop me; I must tell you all; you must, you shall know everything. When I saw *them* together in the wood at Dullingford I knew that he was false. I rejoiced—I was mad with gladness for a few hours. Oh, pity me! that night you know I found him—*dead*. Do you see all my wickedness now, John? It is not possible that you can love me still."

She drew away from him, trembling greatly.

"My darling, I knew these things before."

With a sort of inner sob shaking her, and a wonderful look of amazement in her grey eyes, Anne yielded herself back to his embrace. After a long pause she struggled with a question:

"John, how did you find out about Maria, that she was——"

He interrupted her words.

"Amongst the letters of hers you sent me—those that you thought might give some clue to her past—there was one to her mother—from——"

"Oh, do not say it!" cried out Anne, wildly. "Yes, yes, I see now."

During the short period of their engagement Sir Edward Mallison held aloof from his daughter and John Spencer. He agreed to the marriage in a cold way, as though Anne's future was a matter not concerning him. Lady Mallison had expected that he would welcome John as a son-in-law with enthusiasm. She was surprised, therefore, at his cool demeanour towards the barrister he had formerly favoured. Apparently it was Anne's future husband he objected to, independently of the individual.

He had made himself equally distant on the occasion of the first engagement.

"Edward is most unaccountable in his behaviour. But there, you never know how to take a clever man," she moaned to Hepzibah at a confidential interview. "Instead of being thankful, as I'm sure he has every reason to be, that things have ended so comfortably and *respectably*. It never was in *our* family to have trials and murders—that I'm sure *you'll* bear me out, Hepzibah. He just gives the cold-shoulder to John, who, I'm sure, no one can say hasn't behaved in quite a noble way, coming forward at such a time. A girl's chances are quite gone when a scandal is attached to her. Dear, dear, only to think that I should live to bless Providence that I've only one daughter!"

Her ladyship glanced at the demure trio diligently working at their embroidery, as though entertaining a notion that some tragic occurrence might be worked up to by even such conventional means.

It was in truth a great relief to Lady Mallison that things had so settled themselves. It was to be expected hereafter that young men would fight shy of her daughter, to whose life was attached such a tragic tale of jealousy and death. She regarded Mr. Spencer as a providential friend, relieving her of a great burden. When he obtained his silk gown a year subsequently, she began to look on him with yet more favour. The heinous offence of precocity was laid to his charge by the profession. No one was entitled to write Q.C. after his name before the age of forty. Nevertheless, John continued to smile at

envy, and grew year by year more famous and more portly.

Anne and her father were on much the same terms as of yore in the eyes of superficial observers, when she visited Portland Place. Her mother remarked no difference in their demeanour, only observing that Anne was more reasonable to speak to since she married.

"She doesn't talk half so much nonsense."

The young wife discreetly confined her conversation with her mother to domestic matters, asking advice with duly dutiful admiration of the maternal methods.

Yet, though no approach to the former intimacy was kept up between father and daughter, though no private interviews or exchanges of endearments took place, Anne yearned continually to step over the barrier of coldness and alienation fixed between them.

The Judge lived a solitary life the rest of his days, prosecuting literary studies diligently. He brought out a work on judicature which shed new lustre on his capacity, and laboured continually on lesser trifles which he contributed to Reviews. It could not be said of him that he had sunk absolutely out of the world's sight.

Lady Mallison, as the years went on, resumed her complacent alms and prayers. There was still satisfaction to be derived from men's honour and esteem, and the name of Mallison was held in public approbation once more. After all, Providence had very nearly treated her according to her merits. And her ladyship's phylacteries broadened perceptibly in Hepzibah's sight.

It was only on Sir Edward Mallison's death-bed, some

years after Anne's marriage, that a true reconciliation took place between father and daughter. He sent in hot haste for Anne, after a sudden attack of illness.

"Let her come at once," he had said to his wife, to whom the dangerous nature of his symptoms were not apparent.

"Astræa," he murmured faintly, at Anne's approach, without a vestige of the old irony in his smile, "this is the end of the chapter."

It was many years since he had used that name to her. It had never passed his lips since the evening she returned from Lipswich Gaol. The change in his voice and manner was significant. It left no doubt in her mind that he was dying.

"Father," she cried wildly, "oh, my father!" Flinging herself on her knees beside the bed, she sobbed aloud. He stroked her head gently. They were alone now together.

"Yes," he said, with a long breath, "the tale is ended, the burden is eased."

Again he smiled with relaxed lips and softer eyes.

"Kiss me, my daughter—we have been apart so long." He paused. "But death heals all—expiates all. We thought differently, you and I." He raised himself, speaking fiercely. "No atonement *was* made by me; but no atonement *could* be made. The Almighty cannot be cheated." He fell back once more, murmuring, "I have sinned—I have suffered. Let it pass; my day is done. The heart knoweth its own bitterness. Anne, oh! my

darling, do not let your tears fall for me. Lift your face, my beloved child."

Then for a space he was silent, before broken words fell.

"Ah, just woman that you are—yes, yes, you were right—*she* was a murderess—yet hers was not the greatest crime. Anne saw—Anne forgave—she visited the sin on *me*. Have mercy, oh, Lord, on me—a sinner!"

His voice became ever fainter, and, with hands groping for Anne's head, he fell into a state of unconsciousness.

At night he awoke with a loud cry, "Paquita!" and in a few moments passed away.

Yet Anne did not sorrow as one who might not be comforted. The affliction of loss was lightened to her. The storm of repentance had passed over him; his soul had been through deep waters—such waters as she could not fathom. That strange, relentless stoicism had hidden a sore and restless heart, a great anguish of remorse of which she had never known.

It was indeed a marvellous strength of will and pride that had concealed contrition and the recollection of sin. Anne might think of him now without harshness, might remember that he had suffered and repented. A great and tender pity for him who had passed away filled her heart with grief. But though her tears flowed freely, there was no longer the same bitterness in them. She needed not to check her grief for one unworthy of sympathy. He was her father, and all the strength of the human tie between them might be remembered now. To her children Anne ever spoke with love and tenderness of

the parent she had lost. Grandmamma Mallison continued also to glorify the Judge's fame and attainments, hoping thereby to sow the seeds of ambition in the juvenile minds that developed about her.

THE END.

LONDON
PRINTED BY WHITING & CO., LIMITED, 30 & 32, SARDINIA ST., LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS, W.C.